BIGGLES

ANNUAL



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Biggles


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CONTENTS

STORY

Biggles and the Plane that Disappeared 7
Story continued 28
Story continued 52

PICTURE STORIES

Biggles Seeks Revenge 17
Spitfire Squadron 666 41

FEATURES

Capt. W. E. Johns: Creator of Biggles 5
Biggles: Legend of the Air 6
A Career in the R.A.F. 23
The Battle of Britain 26
The Days of the Pioneer Air Fighters 38
Spot the Enemy 40
The Icarus Syndrome 47
Flying High 50
Dog Fight 62

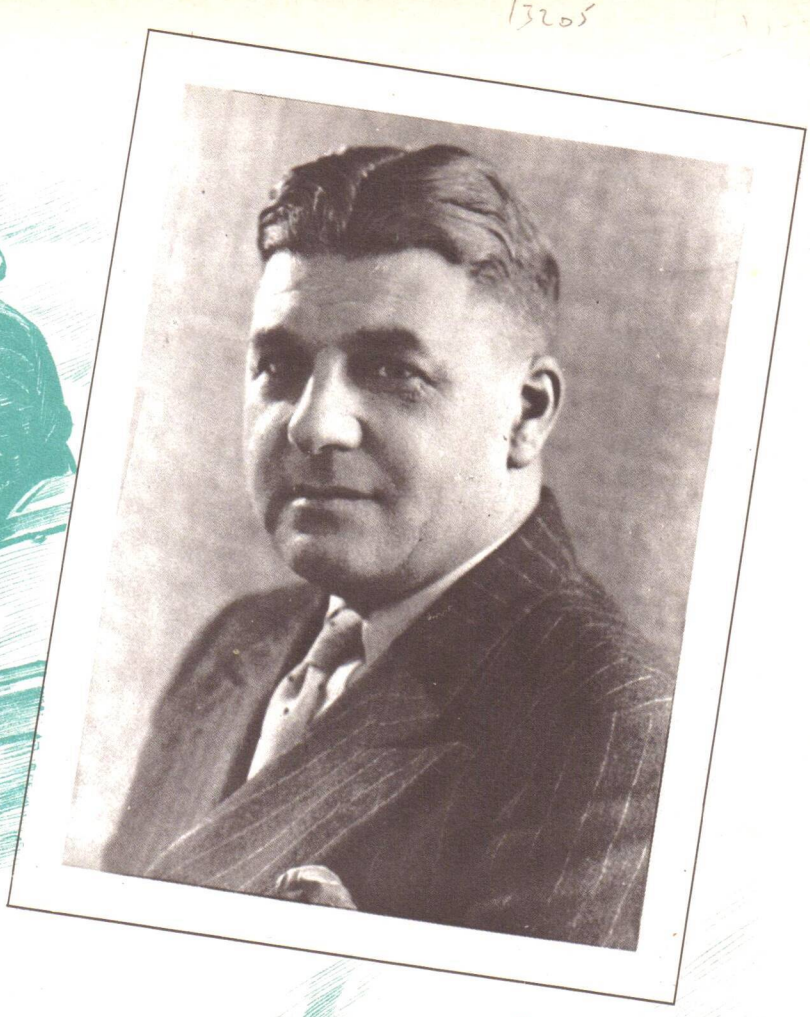
WORLD

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Capt. W. E. Johns

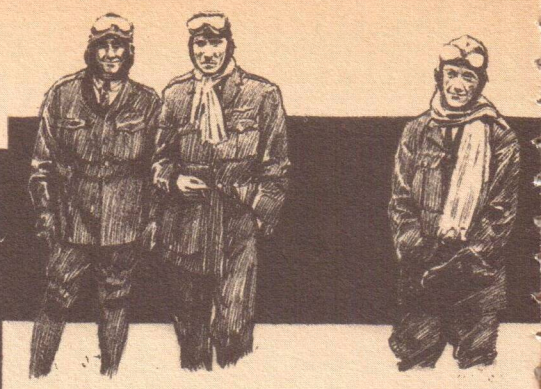
Born in Hertford in 1893, Capt. Johns was learning to be a surveyor when the First World War broke out. He joined the Norfolk Yeomanry in 1913, serving in the Middle East, and was commissioned in 1916. The same year he was transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and served until 1930.

He began writing, and soon captured the imagination of boys everywhere with his exciting tales of the new and glamorous world of air-combat. He wrote nearly 100 Biggles books, creating a popular hero to rival Billy Bunter and Just William among a select handful of all-time favourites.

Undoubtedly, Biggles was a largely idealised version of the author himself, and many of his adventures — particularly those in World War One — were semi-autobiographical. Capt. Johns also created two other popular flyers, Gimlet and Worrals of WAAF.

During World War Two he worked for the Ministry of Information, and thereafter as Air Correspondent for London and Continental newspapers. He continued writing novels and short stories until his death in 1968. A prolific writer, W. E. Johns entertained and thrilled generations of young readers, and is still widely read today.

LEGEND OF THE AIR



James Bigglesworth, better known as Biggles, was born in 1899. His strong sense of adventure, and a natural determination to face whatever life might bring, were notable characteristics during his early life in India, and later at public school in England, where he began his life-long romance with flying.



WORLD WAR ONE

In 1916, at the age of seventeen, Biggles joined the newly formed Royal Flying Corps. A natural flyer, quick to learn, he possessed a charmed life in combat, and survived this testing apprenticeship with 169 Squadron to become an R.F.C. veteran.

During the war years Biggles was to meet many of the figures who were later to dominate his life. His early work for the then Major Raymond of British Intelligence was duly noted, and throughout Biggles' career he was to work for Raymond on many occasions.

FRIEND AND FOE

When Biggles transferred to 266 Squadron in 1917 he was horrified to learn that his weedy cousin, Algernon Lacey, had applied to join. Having once had his life saved by Algy, however, the two went on to become inseparable, life-long chums.

For the first and last time Biggles fell in love, in 1918, with a beautiful Belgian girl, Marie Janis. Tragically, she was also a German spy, and until her death during World War II, he was to find himself, all too often, facing her as an unwilling enemy.

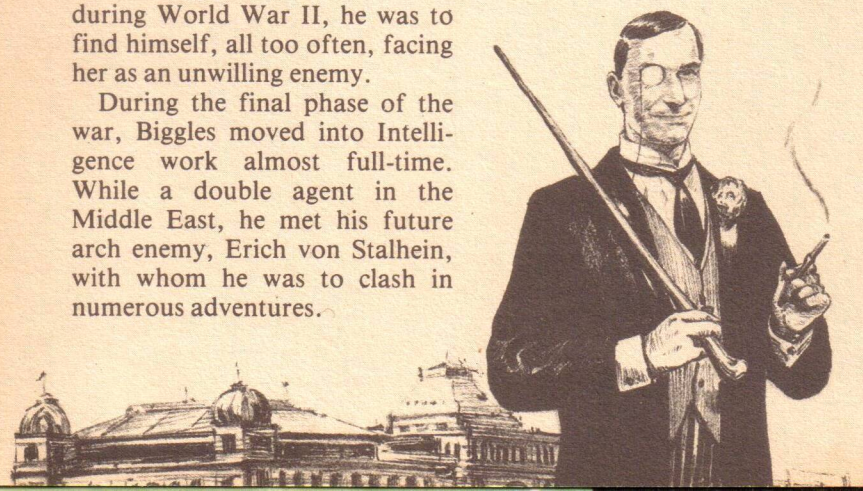
During the final phase of the war, Biggles moved into Intelligence work almost full-time. While a double agent in the Middle East, he met his future arch enemy, Erich von Stalhein, with whom he was to clash in numerous adventures.

BIGGLES AND CO.

With war at an end, Biggles and Algy set up a private flying company, Biggles and Co. Their adventures ranged around the world: revolution in Columbia, war in Brazil, pearls in the Pacific, gold in Japan, spies in India. No job was too great or too dangerous.

A further pilot, Ginger Hebblethwaite — an old protegé of Biggles — joined the two companions to become an essential part of the crew. The three were to remain together until almost the end of their flying careers.

Biggles and Co., with a reputation second to none, prospered, and this life of adventure might have continued uninterrupted had not a greater and more serious adventure called them to arms.



WORLD WAR TWO

Despite his age, Biggles was ordered — on the request of no less than Churchill himself — to form Special Duty Squadron 666, equipped with Spitfires. Algy and Ginger were obvious choices, and among the other recruits was an aristocrat, Bertram Lissie, apparently a member of the idle rich but in fact a connoisseur flyer. He too was to remain part of the well-tried team after the war.

666 distinguished themselves during the Battle of Britain and later in a series of daring but successful operations in various theatres of war, although Biggles found the wholesale slaughter of modern aerial warfare a far cry from the gentlemanly combat of his early experiences.

SPECIAL AIR POLICE

The final phase of Biggles' career began shortly after the war, when Air Commodore Raymond, recently appointed to lead a Special Air Police department in New Scotland Yard, enlisted the services of the four chums.

They proved to be as successful as air detectives as they were fighter pilots, and between them helped solve many tricky cases in this comparatively new area of crime.

In both war and peace Biggles built a legend around himself. Wherever men talk of flying, the name of Biggles is never far from their lips. If you have never met Biggles before, these adventures will provide a stirring introduction to one of the century's great boys' heroes; if you know of him already then it will be like meeting an old friend.

BIGGLES
and the Plane that disappeared

CAPTAIN W.E. JOHNS

Abridged from the novel

When a private plane with one passenger does not return from a joy ride and it is discovered that the passenger gave a false name, Biggles, Ginger and Bertie are called in to solve the mystery. Bertie becomes the hero in this adventure, pitting his wits against a gang of international racketeers.



Chapter One An Aeroplane Fails to Return

Biggles made a tarmac landing and brought the Air Police Auster aircraft to a halt in front of its hangar. Pulling off his gloves he walked on to the Operations Office, where he found Air Constable 'Ginger' Hebblethwaite in the act of hanging up the telephone.

"Who was that?" inquired Biggles casually.

"The Secretary of the Kingsmead Flying Club, in Bedfordshire. He's lost an aircraft and hasn't a clue where to look for it."

"How did that happen?"

"Apparently it just took off and never came back. He's been expecting any moment to hear that someone has found the crash."

"Does he know it crashed?"

"Not for certain."

"Was the pilot flying solo?"

"No. He had a passenger. Would you like me to get the secretary on the phone so that you can have a word with him yourself?"

"No. It would be easier to waffle along to Bedfordshire and get the complete gen. Do you want to come?"

Less than an hour later the Auster was standing outside the offices of the flying club. Biggles and Ginger went in and found the secretary, Lorrimore, at his desk. After the greetings were over Biggles asked: "Now, what's all this about a lost aircraft?"

"Three days ago it took off for a trip of half an hour and hasn't come back."

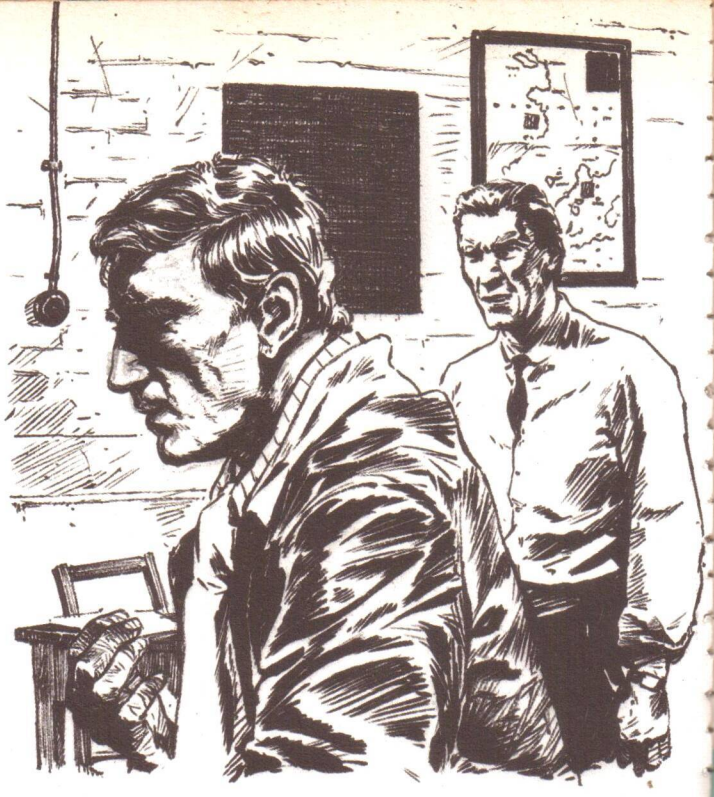
"Who was flying?"

"Taffy Welsh, my chief pilot."

"What about the machine?"

"It's a Piper Cub we bought last year, primarily for crop-dusting. When it's not doing that we sometimes use it for joy-riding at ten bob a time. It's small stuff but it all helps to keep things going. It was one of these casual joy-riders who was with Taffy."

"Did you know him?"



"Never seen him before. He filled in the usual form with his name and address, but it now turns out that the particulars he gave us were false — nothing is known of a man named Lancelot Litton, the name he gave us."

Biggles drew thoughtfully on his cigarette. "At what hour did Taffy take off?"

"Ten past six in the evening. It was broad daylight."

"Well, let's have the details," said Biggles, taking out his notebook. "What colour was the machine?"

"Pale-blue with cream wings."

"Registration number?"

"G-ALZX."

Biggles made a note. "How much petrol had he in the tanks?" he inquired.

"They had been topped up."

"So had Taffy's passenger decided to extend his flight the machine *could* have gone a long way from here."

"I suppose so, although that doesn't make sense."

"Had he got into trouble or decided to extend his flight he would have told you?"

"He had radio. Of course he would."

"Assuming he was able to."

Lorrimore's eyes opened wide. "What are you driving at?"

"I'm wondering about the passenger. What type was this chap Litton?"

"Nothing outstanding about him. About five foot nine, slim, dark, clean shaven. Wore a navy-blue suit with a greenish pork-pie hat. Sort of fellow you might meet anywhere. Probably did an office job. Well-spoken — oh yes, with a very slight north-country accent."

"You'd know him again if you saw him?"

"Definitely."

"Anything else? It could be important."

"That's about as much as I can tell you. I don't see what else I can do — I've had two machines in the air looking for anything like a crash. They're still searching, although of course they wouldn't see the machine had it gone down in a wood."

Biggles shrugged. "If, as you say, his tanks were full, he'd have an endurance of at least five hundred miles."

"But why *should* Taffy go five hundred miles?" demanded Lorrimore, raising his voice.

"He may have had no choice in the matter," returned Biggles evenly.

Lorrimore stared. "Good God! You don't think . . ."

"In a queer affair like this, one has to take every possibility into account, however far-fetched it may seem. We haven't much to go on. However, when I've thought things over I may get an idea."

"Are you going to start a search for the machine?"

"I feel more inclined to check on Taffy's passenger. We have a fair description of the man. One never knows. Now we'll get back to base. If you get any news you might phone me right away."

They were soon back at Operational Headquarters where Bertie greeted them without enthusiasm. "Been having fun without me, I suppose," he complained.

"Far from it," replied Biggles, taking his seat. "We have a job on our hands." He went on to narrate the story briefly. When he had finished he said: "You and Ginger are going

The first fatality in the history of aviation occurred on 17th September 1908 in Virginia, USA, when a Wright biplane crashed to the ground from about 75 feet, killing the passenger, Lieutenant Thomas Etholen Selfridge of the US Signal Corps. The pilot, Orville Wright (one of the Wright brothers), was seriously injured.

to tour all the flying clubs within easy reach asking if anyone has met a pilot answering the description. I shall do the far-away clubs on the telephone."

"Who said anything about a pilot?" exclaimed Ginger.

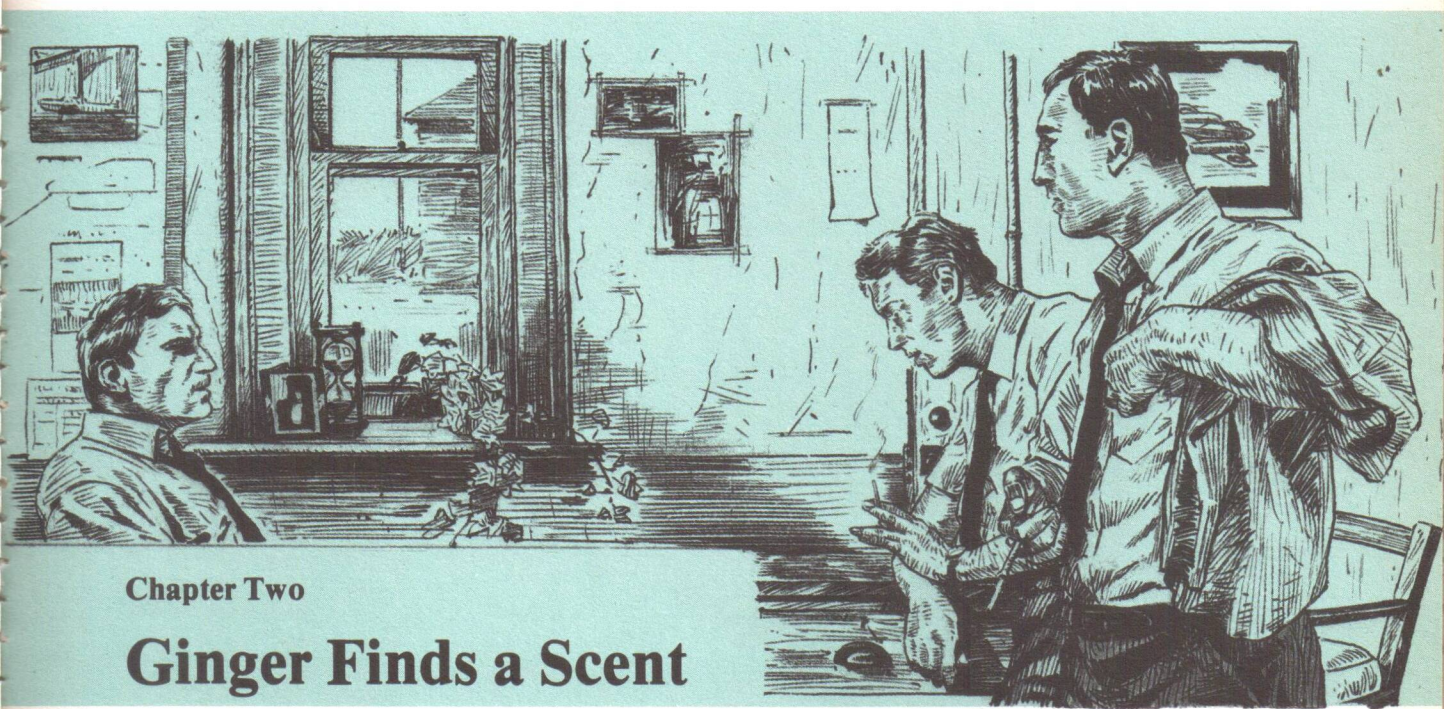
"I did," said Biggles. "Litton gave false particulars of himself. Would he do that if he was only going for a joy-ride? No. He had other ideas. He wasn't coming back. If he *could* fly, he could have shot Taffy, or knocked him on the head, and then flown to anywhere he wanted to go."

"You think Taffy's *dead,*" said Ginger, aghast.

"I wouldn't care to bet he's still alive. Now, if Litton is in fact a pilot, someone in our line of business must know him — by sight, if not by name. That should narrow our search. Anyway, it should be easier to track him than locate the missing Cub, which by now might be anywhere. Anyhow, now you see why I want both of you to get to work and dig out someone who has met Litton. It may take time, but you should pick up the scent somewhere."

"Jolly good," murmured Bertie. "I have a feeling you're right on the beam. Come on, Ginger me lad, let's start sleuthing."

The first man to smoke while piloting a plane was an Englishman, Hubert Latham. In June 1909, high above France, he managed to roll a cigarette, light it and smoke it, despite the blast of a 45mph slipstream through the exposed cockpit of his Antoinette monoplane!



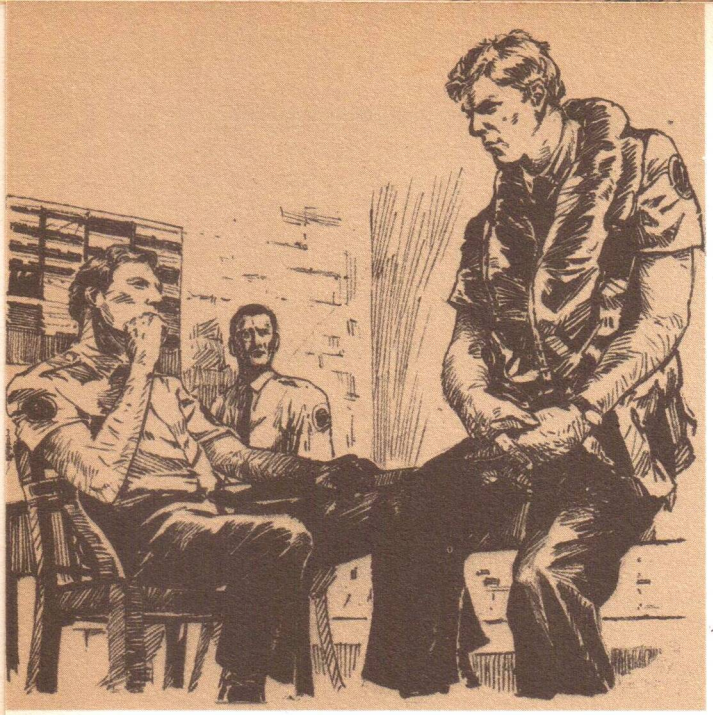
Chapter Two

Ginger Finds a Scent

For three days inquiries were pursued at urgent speed, but without result. Most flying clubs had been visited, or contacted by telephone, all to yield negative answers. The files and records at Scotland Yard, which Biggles examined, failed to produce a clue that might have given a line on the man who had called himself Lancelot Litton. He was not a member of the R.A.F. Club, or the Royal Aero Club. Taffy Welsh had not turned up nor had a crashed Cub been reported. No word had come from the Continent of an unauthorized British aircraft.

Biggles sat in the office with Bertie, discussing other possible lines of procedure. Open on the desk in front of them was a map of the Home Counties. With the airfield as the centre, a circle with a radius of 500 miles had been drawn with a compass.

"Somewhere inside that circle is the machine we're looking for," declared Biggles. "We'll give it another couple of days; if we've heard nothing by then I shall have to —" he broke off, looking up, as Ginger, still in his flying-kit, burst in, an expression of triumph on his face.



"I'm pretty sure I've struck the scent at last," announced Ginger, taking off his helmet and goggles with unusual alacrity. "At the Marsdale Flying School, near Oxford. I was in the clubhouse going through the usual routine of describing Taffy's passenger when one of the instructors, named Gordon, said: 'That sounds mighty like Snifty Chandler to me'."

"Was this fellow Chandler a pilot?" put in Biggles.

"Too true he was, and one with a pretty poor record."

Biggles nodded. "Now we seem to be getting somewhere. Carry on."

"Gordon told me he first met Chandler in the R.A.F. It seems Chandler was a good enough pilot till he took to booze. One thing led to another and out of the Service he went, on his ear, as an undesirable type."

"What a fool the fellow must be."

Ginger went on: "When Gordon was taken on as an instructor at Marsdale who should he find there but Chandler, teaching people to fly."

"Did Gordon tell the management what he knew?"

"No, apparently he is one of those decent chaps who believe in giving wasters another chance. But when, later, he saw Chandler, as drunk as a lord, trying to climb into an aircraft, he spilt the beans. That did it, Chandler was sacked on the spot. That was about two months ago; then he just faded away."

Biggles bit his lip. "Pity. How are we going to check that Chandler was the man?"

"I've got the answer to that one," asserted Ginger, feeling in his pocket. "Here's a photo of the Marsdale lot, pilots and pupils." He put the picture on the desk. "Chandler is the one on the left. Lorrimore said he would know the man anywhere, so all we have to do is show him this photo. How's that for a day's work?"

"Jolly good," complimented Biggles.

In a few minutes, having confirmed Lorrimore was still in his office, the Auster was on its way. On arrival Biggles went straight in.

"I want you to look at this and tell me if you recognize anyone."

"That's the man who came here for a joy-ride," stated Lorrimore, without a moment's hesitation. "Do you know who he is?"

"He's an ex-Sergeant Pilot, R.A.F., named Chandler."

Lorrimore's lips tightened. "The lying swine. He told me he's never been in the air."

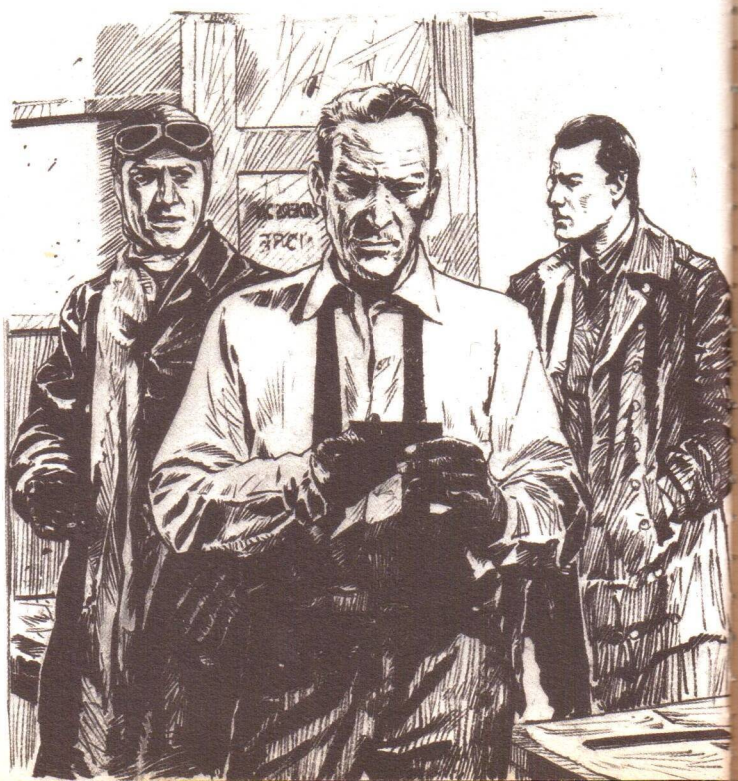
"Of course he did. Obviously, he wanted an aeroplane. As presumably he hadn't the money to buy one he decided to pinch one. A feeling is growing on me that there's more behind this than any of us at first suspected."

"But what about Taffy?"

Biggles shrugged. "Your guess is as good as mine."

Lorrimore shook his head. "I don't get it. Unless Chandler is out of his mind he must realize that if he uses that kite it'll be spotted."

"It may have changed the colour of its



plumage, and its registration. Well, that's all for now. Meanwhile, if you hear anything let us know."

The Auster returned to base.

"Well, and where do we go from here, old boy?" Bertie wanted to know when they were back in the office. "I can't see that the photo has got us far."

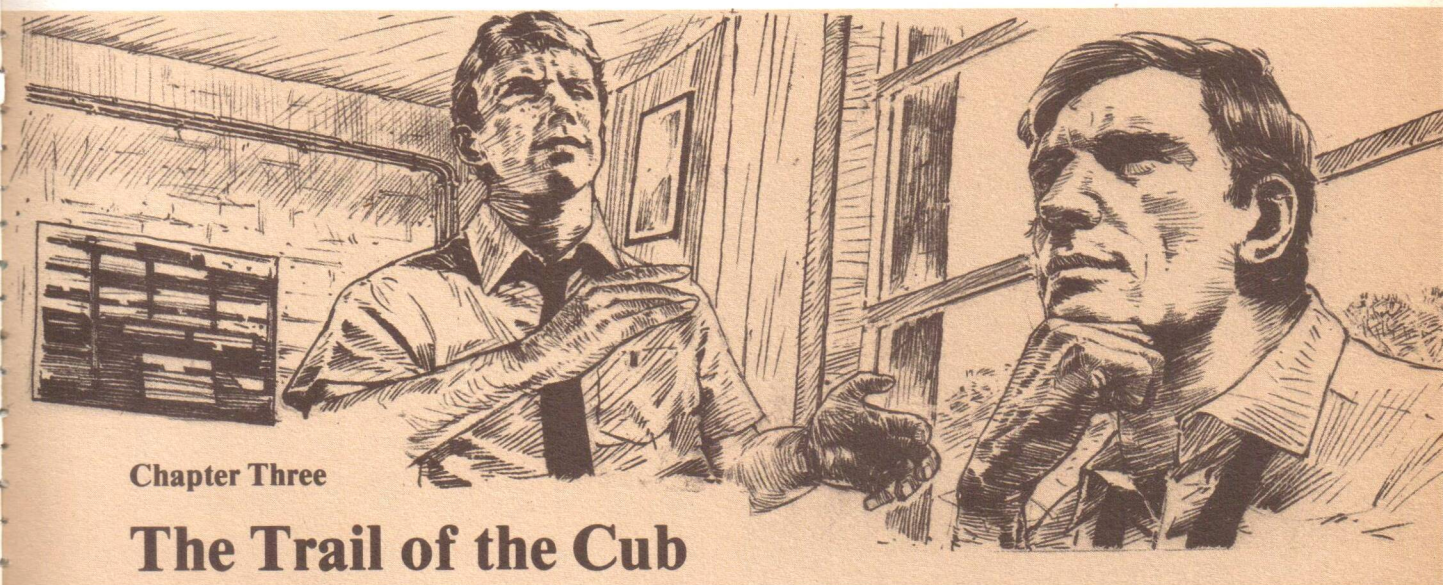
"Let's look at it in the light of what we know. Chandler wanted an aircraft, apparently a small, light, handy machine, since he chose a Cub, and he was prepared to commit a serious crime to get that aircraft, violence, or perhaps murder for all we know. If I'm right that gives us something to work on. Assuming the machine is still airworthy we should be able to find it."

"But you said yourself it might have been repainted in different colours and given a fake registration," argued Bertie.

"Yes; but repainted by whom? If Chandler has done it himself I'd bet any money that on close examination there are places where the original colours show — a smart mechanic would be able to spot such places."

"What mechanic?"

"I'm assuming the machine is being used. That being so Chandler will need fuel and oil — not any old petrol, but aviation spirit. Where's he going to get it when his tanks run low? There's only one place — an aerodrome; and that's where we may catch up with him." Biggles shrugged a shoulder. "I must admit it's a long shot but what else can we do?"



Chapter Three

The Trail of the Cub

Another week passed. Biggles had done all he said he would do but so far nothing had come in from the many areas of investigation. Although not yet prepared to accept defeat he had as usual become taciturn under the influence of frustration.

Then, on the eighth morning, two things happened within minutes of each other to galvanize the office into activity.

First, Marcel Brissac, the astute air-Interpol colleague in Paris, had rung up to say that a Piper Cub, which had declined to answer signals, had been picked up the previous night over the Plaine de la Crau north of Marseilles. It had been challenged by a searchlight but had slipped out of the beam and last been heard heading north.

"Plaine de la Crau," murmured Ginger. "That rings a bell."

"It should. We once had a spot of bother there. Wonderful landmark for airmen. Eighty square miles as flat as a billiards table and practically nothing but sand and shingle."

The telephone rang again. This time the caller was the manager of Lysett, a small private aerodrome near Frome, in Somerset. One of the club mechanics had reported that he had recently refuelled a Piper Cub which had been repainted. It had been running short of fuel and oil. The tanks had been filled right up and paid for in cash.

The first man to cross the English Channel in an aeroplane was Louis Blériot in a Blériot XI monoplane. He took off at 4.40 am on July 25th 1909 and landed at 5.20 am in a field near Dover, to win the £1,000 prize offered by the *Daily Mail*.

Biggles thanked the speaker and said he would send someone along right away to interview the mechanic. "Ginger," he went on, "run through the file to see if there's a Captain John Maxwell on the list of private owners. Bertie, check if there's a Cub carrying the registration G-ALCK."

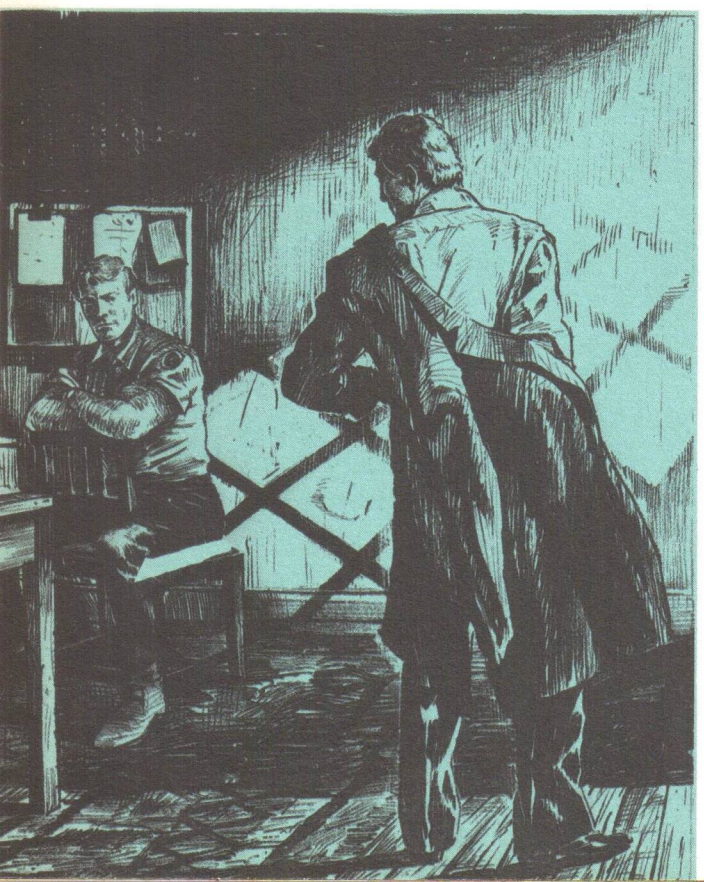
There wasn't.

"That's what I thought," asserted Biggles. "Better and better. This is where we get weaving. This is the drill. Bertie, you'll go to Lysett. If the man who called himself Captain Maxwell does turn out to be Chandler, as he got the petrol there once he may come back for more. I want you to wait at the airfield until you get further orders from me."

"And if Chandler does turn up?"

Biggles hesitated. "I think you'd better let him fill up," he decided. "I'm thinking of Taffy. If you tackle Chandler on the spot he may keep his mouth shut . . . no, let him have what petrol he wants and tail him to see where he goes. He should return to wherever he's hiding the machine. You'll have to be cagey about that — the operation is to find out where Chandler is keeping that Cub; at present just that and nothing more. You won't land, of course, but it might not be a bad idea, if you do find Chandler's landing field, to mark it with something."

"Such as?"





"In the old days of war flying we used to mark enemy targets with a small paper bag of flour, or french chalk. The bag bursts when it hits the ground and makes a white spot."

"Righto," said Bertie lightly. "If that's all I'll press on." He departed on his mission. Biggles sat by the telephone and lit a cigarette.

"I have high hopes. Barring a coincidence it's almost certain that the Cub which landed at Lysett is the one we're looking for."

The call from Bertie came through half an hour later. It told them what they were so anxious to know. "Captain Maxwell *was* Chandler," Biggles told Ginger in a quick aside. The only other information Chandler had volunteered to the mechanic was that he had recently bought the machine second-hand, and for the time being was keeping it at home, being a landowner with plenty of ground not far away. That was all.

Bertie would ring again if he had anything fresh to report. If he had to act quickly, Grant, the aerodrome manager, would do so for him, to report what had happened.

"So far so good," said Biggles, when he had rung off. "Chandler told the mechanic he was keeping the machine on his own ground. Certainly he must be hiding the Cub somewhere when it's not in use, but I question if the ground is his own property. It implies he's not running a racket on his own account. He must have somebody behind him, to finance him."

Biggles looked at his watch. "I'll slip out and get some lunch. You stay by the phone in case Bertie comes through again. I shan't be long."

The greatest feat in learning to fly is usually credited to T.O.M. Sopwith. Having assembled his own Howard-Wright biplane, he took it on its first test flight on 22nd October 1910, never having flown before. He wrote the plane off, but escaped unhurt and, not to be put off, immediately ordered another plane!

On 21st November he made his second attempt in a second Howard-Wright and, taking off just after lunch, had qualified for his pilot's Certificate by teatime. He carried his first passenger that evening and within three weeks had set up new British distance and duration records, coming second in a competition for the longest distance flown by a British pilot in a British aeroplane.

Biggles was away for less than an hour. He returned to find a call had come through from Grant, the aerodrome manager. The wanted Cub had just landed for fuel and oil. Its tanks were nearly empty. The fuel had been supplied and it had taken off with Bertie following on.

"There's nothing we can do until we hear from Bertie. You might as well dash for something to eat while the going's good," said Biggles cheerfully. "Presently we may be too busy to think about food."

In this, however, he was mistaken. When Ginger came in after a hurried meal there had been no further word from Lysett. Nor from Bertie, who might possibly have landed somewhere else.

When three o'clock came and the telephone remained silent Biggles was frowning. By four he was looking worried. Five o'clock found him pacing the floor in his irritation.

"What the deuce can Bertie be doing?" he demanded.

At eight o'clock, with daylight fading, he sat down and stubbed his cigarette in his ashtray. "Something's gone wrong," he murmured.

Chapter Four

Not In The Programme



In supposing that something had gone wrong Biggles was correct. Bertie had reached Lysett aerodrome without any bother, and having made himself known to the aerodrome manager, had questioned the mechanic. This done, he made himself comfortable in a deck-chair on the veranda of the clubhouse, a position from which he could see everything that went on. It was a fine day, warm, with intermittent sunshine, the sky being about a quarter covered by slow-moving cumulus cloud.

Within twenty minutes the purr of a light plane flying low brought him to the alert, and he recognized a Cub. He could hardly believe that so soon it was the machine for which he was waiting. He stood up, leaning in a casual attitude against the veranda rail, while the machine taxied slowly to the petrol filling station, where it stopped. Bertie strolled over.

It was Chandler. He greeted Bertie with a nod, as one airman to another.

"Nice day," observed Bertie carelessly. "Coming in for a drink?" The offer was declined. "Going far?"

"No. Just a practice cross-country," answered Chandler. "You?"

"Same as you. Putting in a little flying time. I shall be pushing along myself presently." Bertie made this last remark in anticipation of Chandler seeing him in the air in the near future.

That was all. Chandler paid, and getting back into his seat started up. Then, with a wave, he taxied into position to take off. Bertie was already walking towards his Auster. He waited until the Cub was over the distant trees that ringed the aerodrome and then took off to follow it.

As soon as he was in the air he could see the Cub perhaps a mile ahead, flying level at a height of about a thousand feet, which was well below the clouds. From time to time he snatched a glance at the ground in the hope of picking up a landmark he knew, but the country was mostly well-wooded farm land without a conspicuous feature.

For a few minutes the Cub flew straight on, then two things happened together. The Cub appeared to be slowly losing height when the Auster's engine back-fired, and the aircraft began vibrating. He had no intention of risking a serious crash even for Chandler, so he retarded the throttle and began a quick inspection of the ground for a suitable place to land. The Cub was gliding in to land in a long pasture about a mile in front, so he held straight on for the field, just holding flying speed. As the engine was no use to him, to reduce the risk of fire should he pile up he switched off.

Remembering his bag of chalk he threw it out of the open side window and then touched down almost on the track made by the Cub, ending his run within yards of it.

Chandler had got out and was standing by his machine, watching him. Bertie sat still, to recover from what, for any pilot, is an unnerving moment. But that didn't prevent him from thinking fast. Looking round he observed, at the far end of the field, a large red brick house. Seeing Chandler now walking towards him he got out, smiling bleakly.

"So it's you again," said Chandler, in a curious tone of voice. "Why did you land here?"

"Why?" Bertie looked pained. "Are you kidding? I should have had a rough passage if, at the last jiffy, I hadn't spotted you going down just in front of me." He looked at the nose of the Auster, from which a wisp of smoke was rising, indicating clearly that the engine was overheated. "Unless there's anywhere nearer I'll ring Lysett and ask them to send along someone who can fix me up. Who lives at the big house? They should be on the phone."

"It's owned by an uncle of mine," answered Chandler, after a long pause. "I dropped in to look him up. You walk on. I shall bring my Cub along and put it near one of the barns in case I'm persuaded to stay the night."

"Fair enough." Bertie started walking towards the house, a matter of a hundred yards. He felt confident that up to the moment Chandler suspected nothing. After all, the forced landing had been genuine enough. Bertie's main concern was to get his report off to Biggles; he would speak to Lysett on the telephone giving the address of the house. Grant would have the intelligence to pass word on to Biggles. At the worst, Bertie pondered, he would merely be stuck where he was for a few hours.

Reaching a wicker gate he watched Chandler taxi the Cub to a big empty hay barn in the corner of the field nearest the house. The field itself was of a fair size, level, but rather long and narrow, so that landings would be affected by the direction of a wind of any force. The surrounds were thickly wooded; indeed, trees, large and small, isolated and in groups, lined the hedges on all sides. Moreover, the meadow was low-lying, which meant that in bad weather it would not be easy to find. It was not the sort of place where anyone would expect to find an airfield.

Satisfied with his inspection he waited for Chandler to join him and they went on together up the garden path. Chandler opened the door of the house like a man who is at home and went straight through a large untidy kitchen, where a gaunt, sour-faced woman was doing something, to a door on the far side. This opened into a sitting-room furnished with some degree of comfort.

A heavily-built man of about sixty reclined in an armchair smoking a thin black cigar. He wore large, horn-rimmed spectacles, from behind which strikingly pale-blue eyes regarded Bertie with a disconcerting stare. His face was square, broad and flat, rising to a domed forehead from which the hair had receded. Apart from a small tuft of grey beard he was clean shaven.

"Come through to the other room, Uncle," said Chandler, with an accent on the word

At the beginning of World War 1 there was only one British plane fitted with a machine gun. This was a Henry Farman biplane of No. 5 Squadron of the Royal Flying Corps, in which the pilot, 2nd Lt. L. A. Strange, had fitted a Lewis gun. Strange was later ordered by his C.O. to remove both the gun and its mounting from the cockpit on the grounds that the plane's performance was being adversely affected by their extra weight.

Uncle, "I have some news for you." Over his shoulder to Bertie, as he walked to another door, he said: "Excuse me a moment. I won't keep you long."

When ten minutes had elapsed and the two men had not returned Bertie had become definitely uneasy. He got up and walked to a window. The Auster was not where he had left it. He polished his eye-glass and surveyed the hedges that bounded the meadow. That settled it. The Auster had gone.

Chapter Five

A Proposition

Bertie had turned back into the room, bracing himself for trouble, when Chandler and his elderly companion returned.

"What have you done with my aeroplane?" he demanded coldly.

Chandler must have expected the question, for the answer came readily. "Some bullocks are being turned into the field and it was thought advisable to move it in case they damaged it."

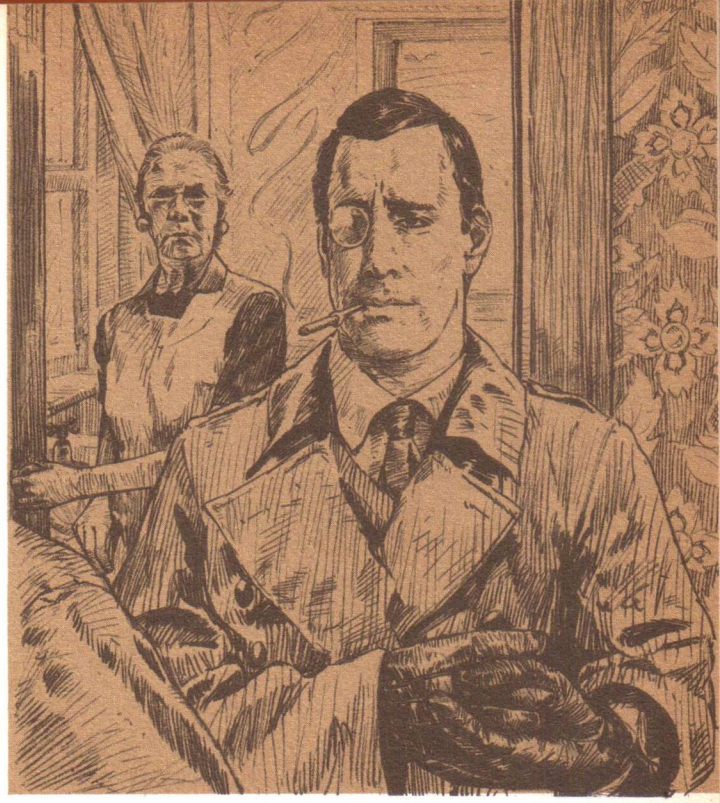
Bertie looked back at the window, and it was with mixed feelings that he saw a line of cattle walking through a gate into the field.

"Where have you put the Auster?"

"With my Cub. In the barn. It'll be all right there."

"May I use the telephone?"

Chandler made a wry face. "I'm sorry, but at the moment it happens to be out of order. That's why I've been so long. I had to find a chap to go on a bicycle to the nearest phone box, to let the post office people know. While you're waiting you might as well make yourself comfortable. Let me introduce my uncle," he said smoothly. "Doctor Paul Hammal."



The old man nodded.

"My name's Lissie," informed Bertie.

"Mine's Maxwell. John Maxwell. Good. Now we know each other. Do sit down."

Bertie found a chair.

Chandler sat opposite. "I'd say you've been flying for some time."

"Quite a while," admitted Bertie.

"In the Air Force?"

"During the war. I packed up when it was all over."

"But you're still flying — you must have plenty of money."

"Enough." Bertie felt sure the questions were leading up to something. The turning of the cattle into the field had been an excuse to move the Auster. That the phone was out of order, which he did not believe, was merely another excuse for keeping him there.

Chandler went on, as if making casual conversation. "What do you do for a living?"

Bertie forced an apologetic smile. "Matter of fact, I don't have to do anything. I own some property in the country."

"Very nice, too. Still, I suppose you could do with more."

"Who couldn't?"

Chandler glanced at the doctor who spoke for the first time. "I do a certain amount of business abroad. Freight charges are so high



that it isn't easy to show a profit, so my nephew sometimes accommodates me by using his own plane."

"I see," said Bertie, slowly. "But doesn't overseas flying involve a lot of forms and all that nonsense?"

"Not the way I do it," murmured Chandler, with a sly smile.

Bertie affected an expression of disapproval. "You're not by any chance talking about *smuggling?*"

"Practically every tourist tries to diddle the Customs. So what. It doesn't matter whether the article is worth five pounds or five thousand, the principle is the same."

Bertie had to admit there was truth in this.

"Well," went on Chandler. "Now you know, do you feel like having a nibble?"

Bertie did not answer at once. The situation called for thought. To accept too quickly would look suspicious. If he refused anything might happen. One thing was certain. These men, having told him so much, would never let him go.

"Make up your mind," prompted Chandler. "You can make a couple of hundred quid a trip."

"If you can make money as easily as you say you can," countered Bertie, "why let me in on it?"

"That's a reasonable question and the answer is simple. Two aeroplanes can do more than one. Your Auster can seat four, my Cub only two. Moreover, once in a while a machine needs a complete overhaul, and while it's unserviceable the organization is held up. Another thing. Two machines could make refuelling easier. They could ring the changes at different petrol stations."

"Just as a matter of interest," inquired Bertie, "what happens if I refuse to play?"

"You won't — if you're wise," went on Chandler, no longer smiling. "I should still have two aeroplanes to work with."

"Meaning that you're going to have my Auster, anyway."

"I try to speak plainly without beating about the bush."

"What is there to prevent me, when I get my hand on a joystick again, from flying off and not coming back?"

"That couldn't happen. I should do the first trip with you. What happened would incriminate you to the extent of making you one of us."

Bertie looked amused. "In other words, I should be one of the gang."

The old man spoke. "Perhaps you'd like something in advance." He got up, walked to a desk and from a drawer took a thick wad of notes, tossing it on the table. "There's plenty more where that came from."

"Would you mind if I took a little while to think it over?"

The old man answered. "Take all the time you want. There's no desperate hurry."

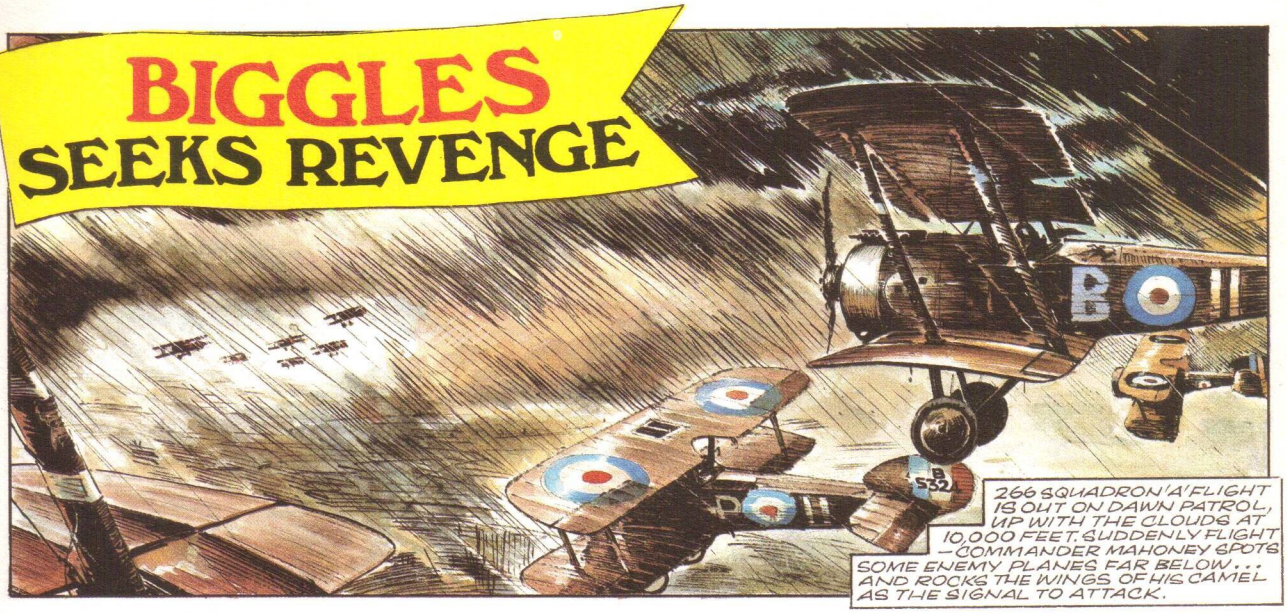
"We have some spare rooms." Chandler smiled again, cynically. "You'll get all the home comforts, and I'm sure you'll have more sense than to do anything silly." As he spoke Chandler allowed his jacket to fall open far enough to reveal a revolver in a shoulder holster. "This way." He opened a door and they went up to a room on the first floor. "You should be all right here," said Chandler from the doorway. "Nice and quiet, just the job for serious thinking." He retired, closing the door behind him. A key turned softly in the lock.

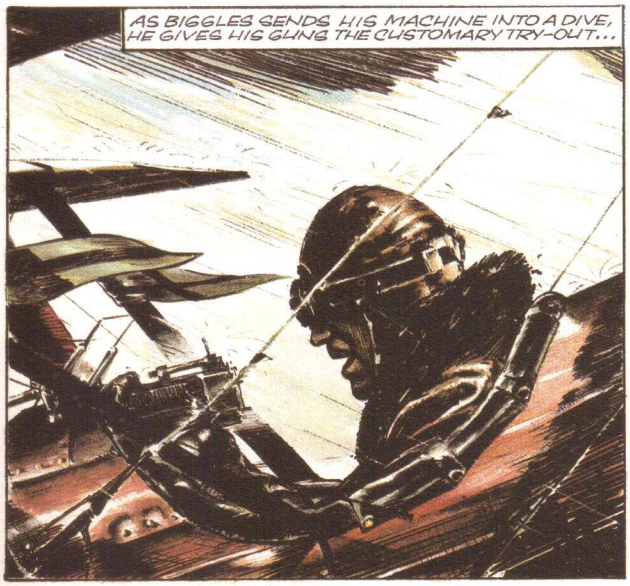
Bertie took stock. It was an ordinary little room furnished cheaply but comfortably. There was one window, but there was no question of escape that way. Four steel rods had been fixed horizontally across it. Having satisfied himself there was no immediate prospect of getting away, he sat on the bed to think things over. More by luck than judgement he had landed in Chandler's headquarters; but whether it would turn out to be good luck or bad remained to be seen.

continued on page 28

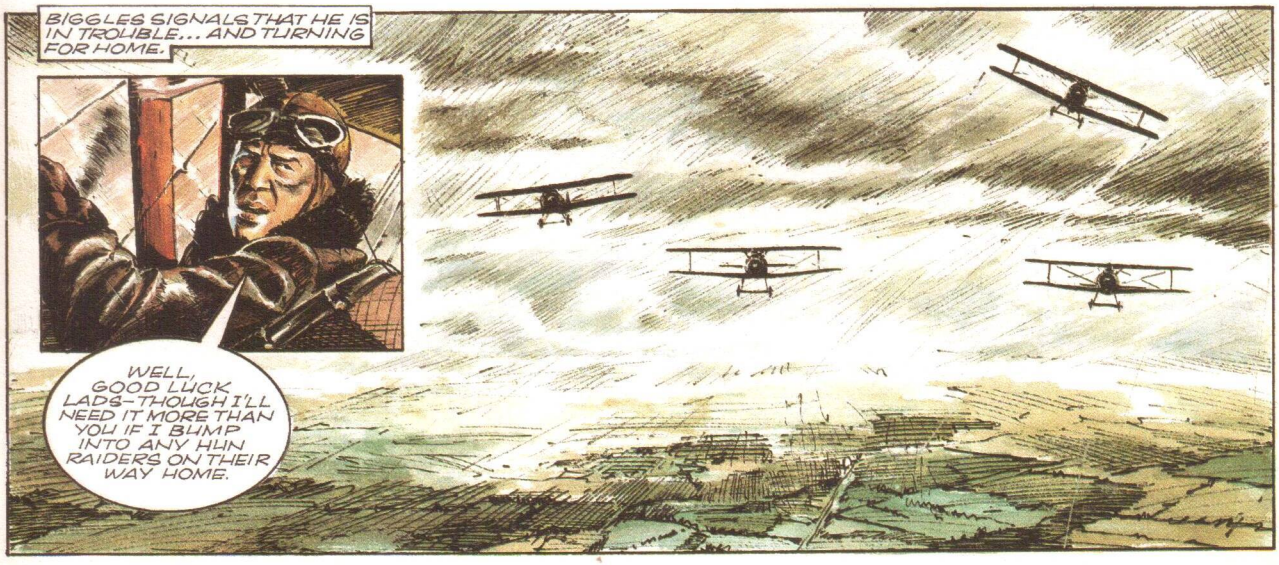


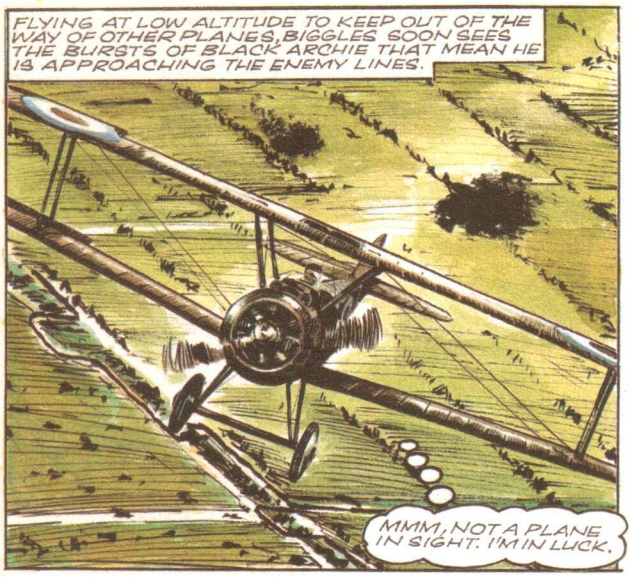
BIGGLES SEEKS REVENGE

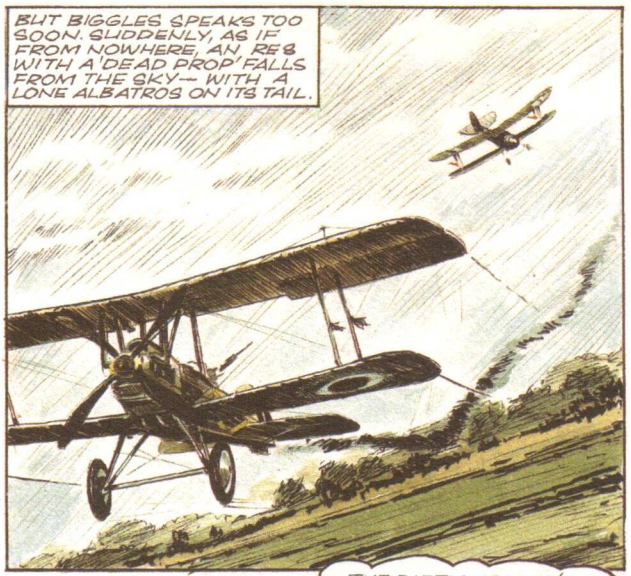


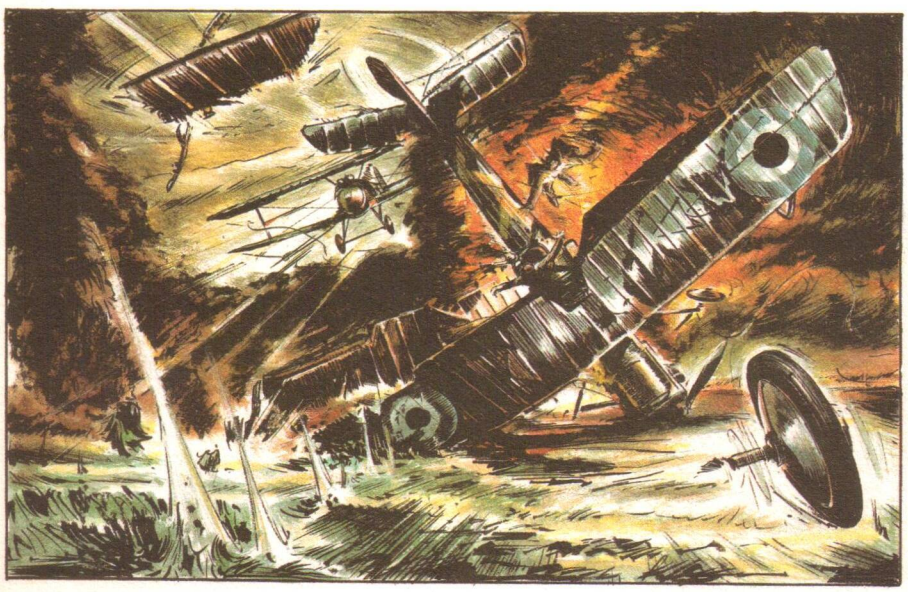







FLYING AT LOW ALTITUDE TO KEEP OUT OF THE WAY OF OTHER PLANES, BIGGLES SOON SEES THE BURSTS OF BLACK ARCHIE THAT MEAN HE IS APPROACHING THE ENEMY LINES.
MMM, NOT A PLANE IN SIGHT. I'M IN LUCK.


BUT BIGGLES SPEAKS TOO SOON. SUDDENLY, AS IF FROM NOWHERE, AN RE8 WITH A 'DEAD PROP' FALLS FROM THE SKY— WITH A LONE ALBATROS ON ITS TAIL.



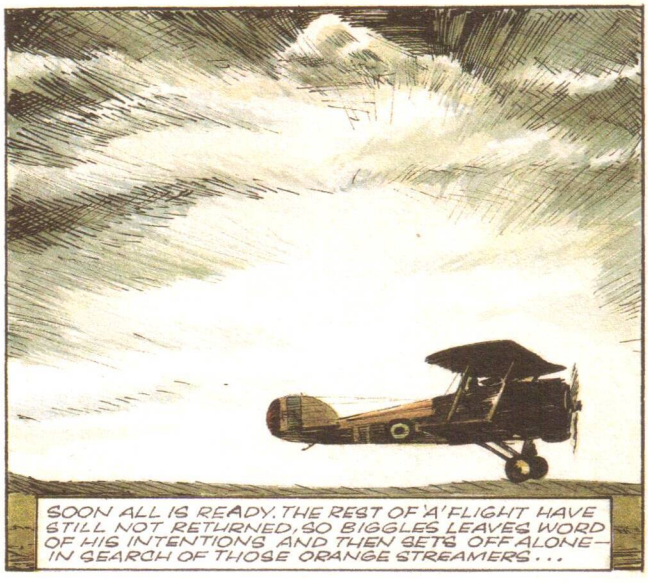

THE DIRTY HOUND! SHOOTING A MAN WHEN HE'S AS GOOD AS DOWN. IF I WEREN'T DEFENCELESS MYSELF, I'D HAVE HIS AIRERONS FOR FIREWOOD AND HIS GUTS FOR GARTERS.

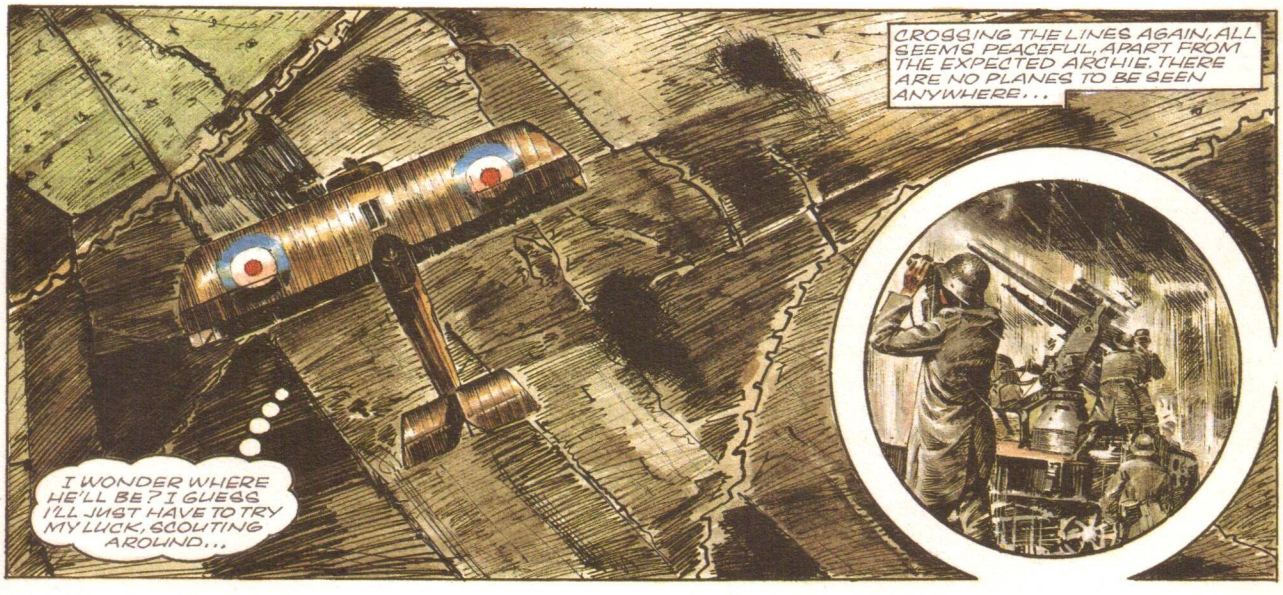

HE WON'T GET AWAY WITH THIS—I'LL BE BACK TO TAKE REVENGE...

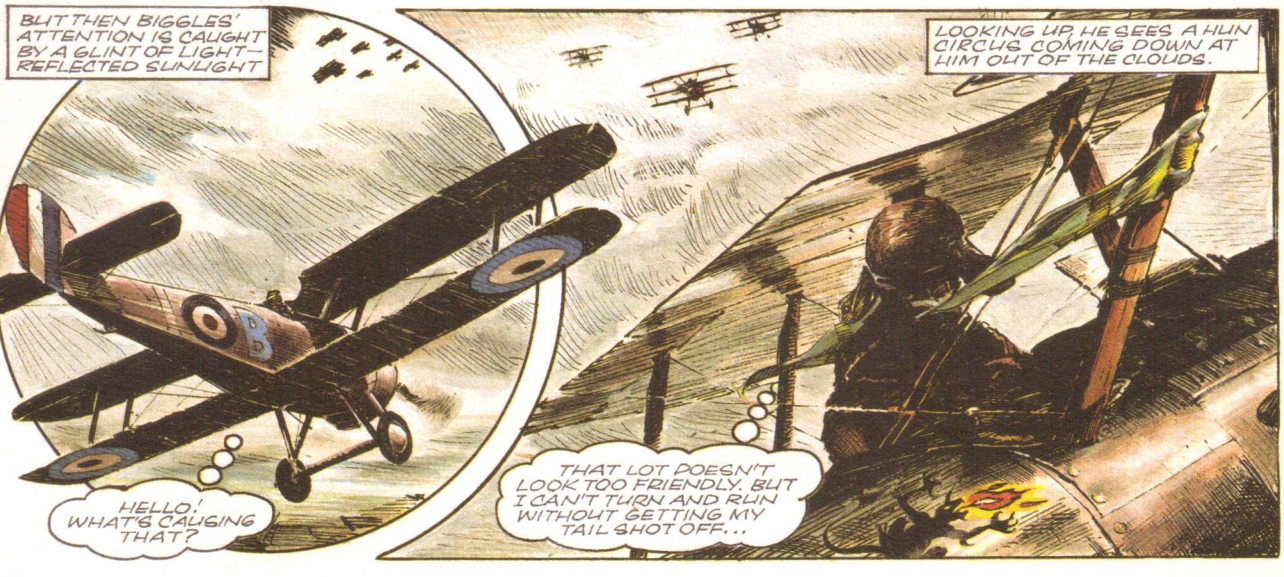


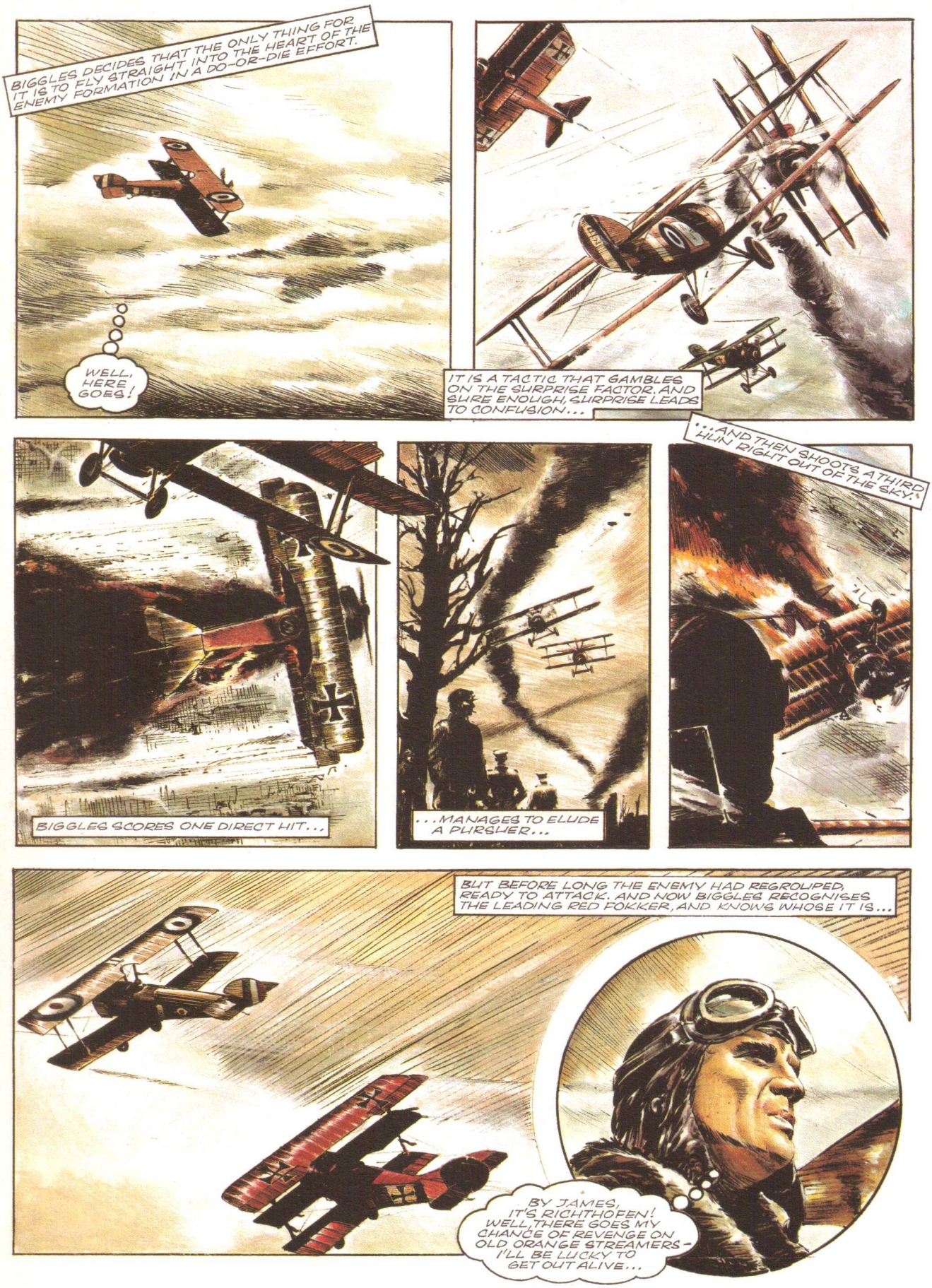



BACK AT MARANIQUE, BIGGLES PACES ANGRILY UP AND DOWN AS WORK GOES ON TO MAKE HIS CAMEL OPERATIONAL AGAIN.

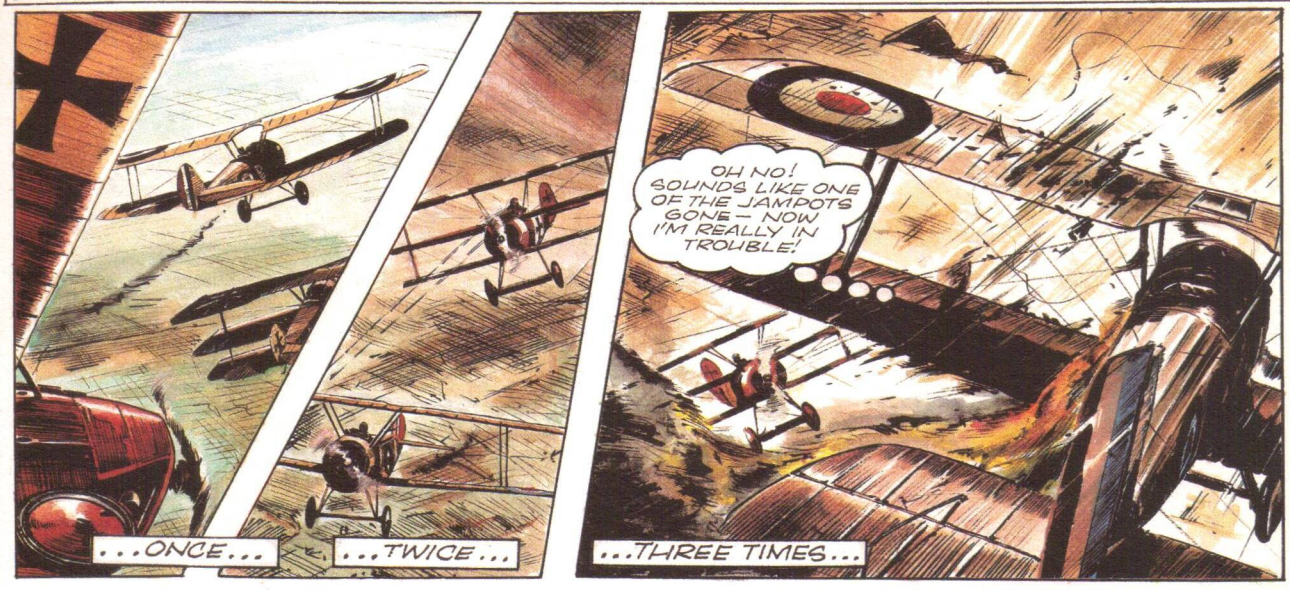

SOON ALL IS READY. THE REST OF 'A' FLIGHT HAVE STILL NOT RETURNED, SO BIGGLES LEAVES WORD OF HIS INTENTIONS AND THEN SETS OFF ALONE— IN SEARCH OF THOSE ORANGE STREAMERS...


CROSSING THE LINES AGAIN, ALL SEEMS PEACEFUL, APART FROM THE EXPECTED ARCHIE. THERE ARE NO PLANES TO BE SEEN ANYWHERE...
I WONDER WHERE HE'LL BE? I GUESS I'LL JUST HAVE TO TRY MY LUCK, SCOUTING AROUND...

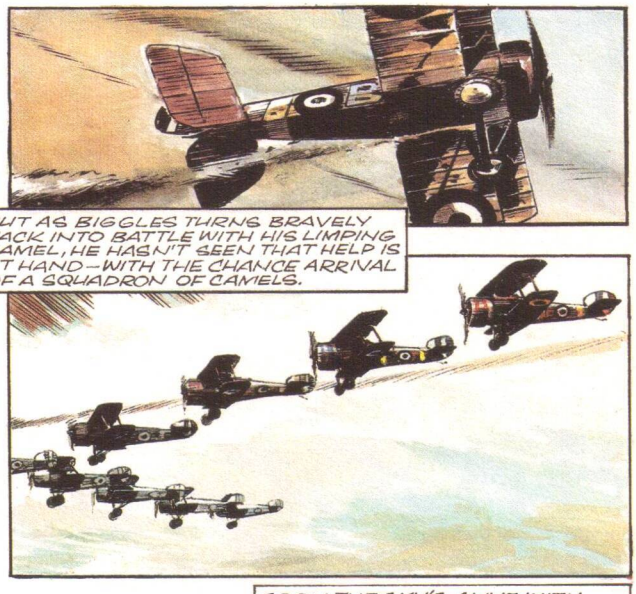

BUT THEN BIGGLES' ATTENTION IS CAUGHT BY A GLINT OF LIGHT— REFLECTED SUNLIGHT
LOOKING UP, HE SEES A HUN CIRCUS COMING DOWN AT HIM OUT OF THE CLOUDS.
HELLO! WHAT'S CAUSING THAT?
THAT LOT DOESN'T LOOK TOO FRIENDLY. BUT I CAN'T TURN AND RUN WITHOUT GETTING MY TAIL SHOT OFF...

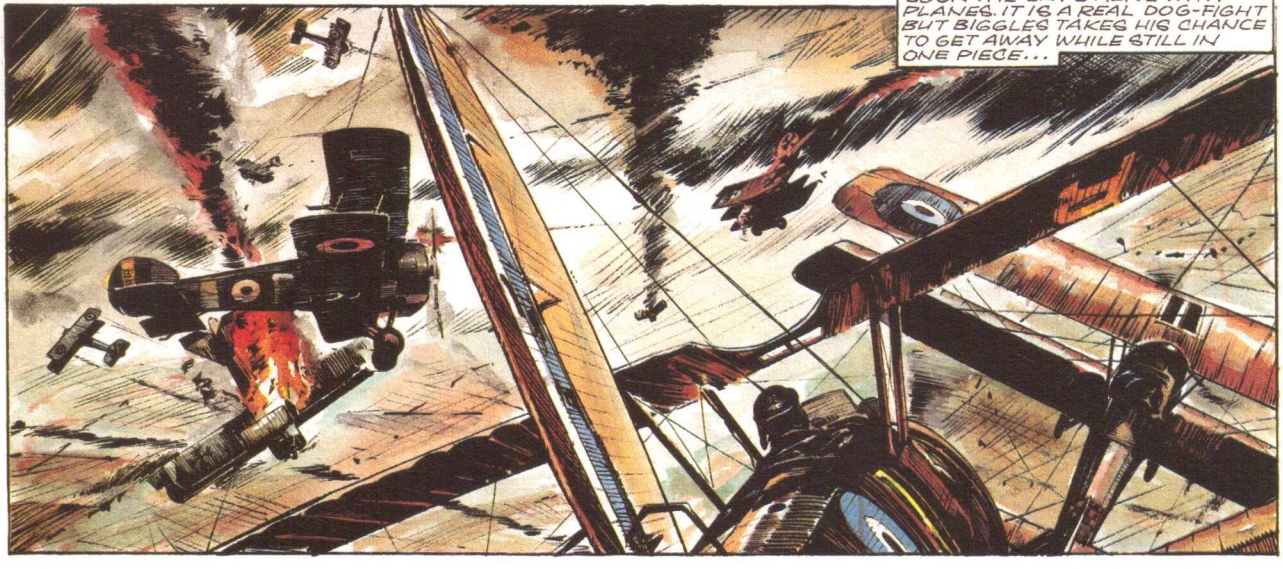

BIGGLES DECIDES THAT THE ONLY THING FOR IT IS TO FLY STRAIGHT INTO THE HEART OF THE ENEMY FORMATION IN A DO-OR-DIE EFFORT.
WELL, HERE GOES!
IT IS A TACTIC THAT GAMBLES ON THE SURPRISE FACTOR. AND SURE ENOUGH, SURPRISE LEADS TO CONFUSION...
...AND THEN SHOOTS A THIRD HUN RIGHT OUT OF THE SKY.
BIGGLES SCORES ONE DIRECT HIT...
...MANAGES TO ELUDE A PURSUER...
BUT BEFORE LONG THE ENEMY HAD REGROUPED, READY TO ATTACK. AND NOW BIGGLES RECOGNISES THE LEADING RED FOKKER, AND KNOWS WHOSE IT IS...
BY JAMES, IT'S RICHTHOFEN! WELL, THERE GOES MY CHANCE OF REVENGE ON OLD ORANGE STREAMERS - I'LL BE LUCKY TO GET OUT ALIVE...

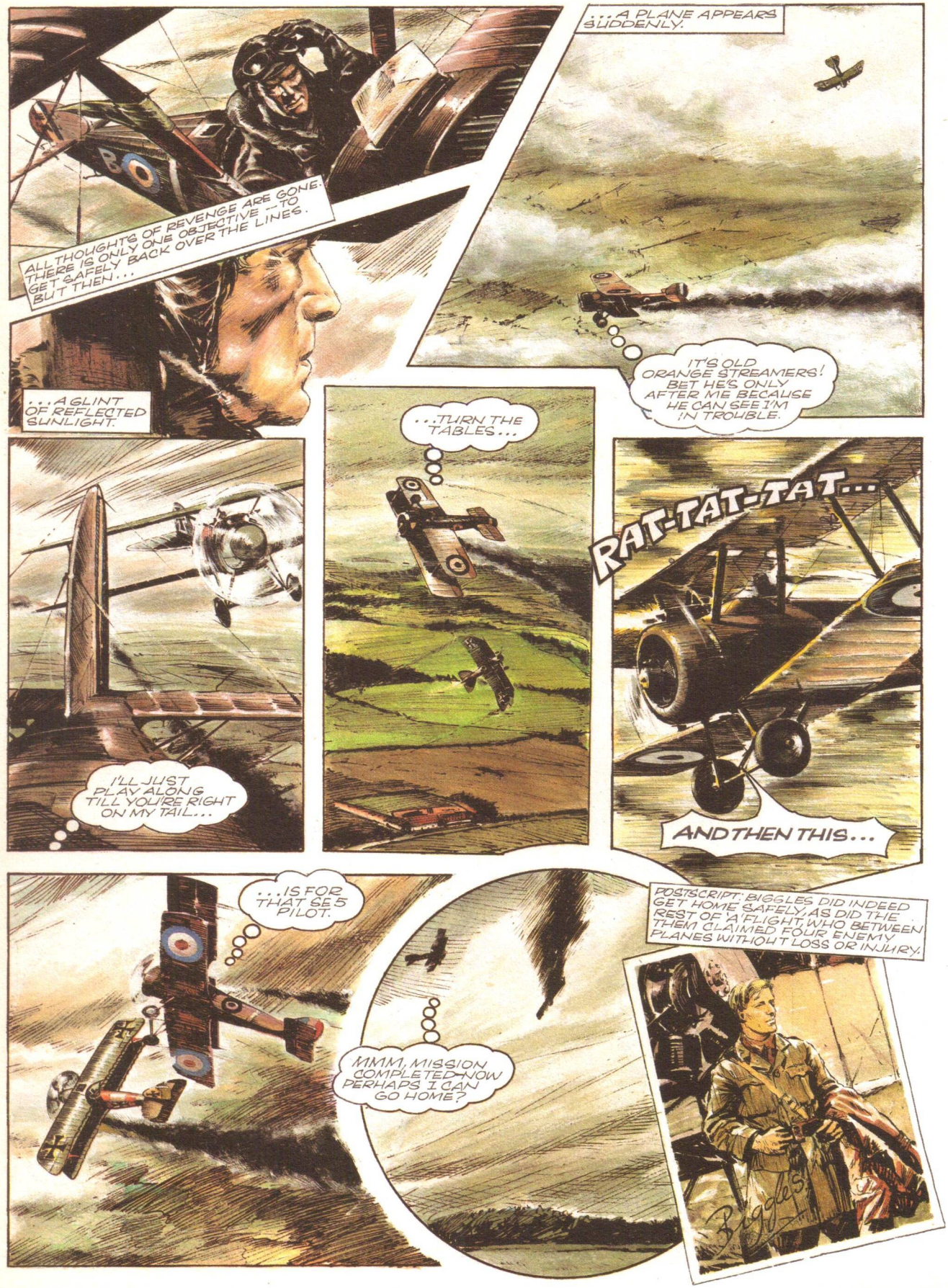
BIGGLES IS SOON UNDER HEAVY FIRE AND ALTHOUGH HIS FLYING IS SUPERB HE CANNOT AVOID BEING HIT...










ALL THOUGHTS OF REVENGE ARE GONE. THERE IS ONLY ONE OBJECTIVE — TO GET SAFELY BACK OVER THE LINES.
BUT THEN...
...A GLINT OF REFLECTED SUNLIGHT.
...A PLANE APPEARS SUDDENLY.
IT'S OLD ORANGE STREAMERS! BET HE'S ONLY AFTER ME BECAUSE HE CAN SEE I'M IN TROUBLE.
I'LL JUST PLAY ALONG TILL YOU'RE RIGHT ON MY TAIL...
...TURN THE TABLES...
RAT-TAT-TAT...
AND THEN THIS...
...IS FOR THAT SE 5 PILOT.
MMM, MISSION COMPLETED NOW PERHAPS I CAN GO HOME?
POSTSCRIPT: BIGGLES DID INDEED GET HOME SAFELY, AS DID THE REST OF 'A' FLIGHT, WHO BETWEEN THEM CLAIMED FOUR ENEMY PLANES WITHOUT LOSS OR INJURY.
Biggles



A career in the RAF

Have you ever thought you'd like to be a pilot — not an airline pilot, but a fighter pilot in the RAF? Well, this is just one of the exciting careers the Air Force has to offer . . .

Two of the aircraft flown by RAF pilots: the Jaguar, used for attack and reconnaisance, and the Tornado, the latest multi-role combat aircraft.



To become a pilot in the RAF, the minimum qualifications you will need are the same as is required for any form of officer service: 5 GCE 'O' levels at Grade C or above, including English Language and Maths. You must be at least 17½ years old when you apply.

If you wish to join in this way, without going to university, you apply for a Direct Entry Commission. But you can also apply later as a graduate, or alternatively get the RAF to sponsor you through a degree course. These are known respectively as Graduate Entry and University Cadetship.

There is an upper age limit of 23 for the Cadetship and 23½ for Direct or Graduate Entry.

Whichever way you decide to apply, if you are applying as a potential pilot you will go through an initial selection procedure and do up to three and a half days of tests at the Officers and Aircrew Selection Centre (OASC).

You will probably arrive at the Centre in the afternoon, as the first day is simply for a chest X-ray and a chance to get to know other candidates and to settle in.

Aptitude Tests begin early on the second day. There are written tests covering dial and diagram reading and symbol recognition; also co-ordination tests, done on machines and electrically scored, measuring the way your hands, eyes and feet work together, your



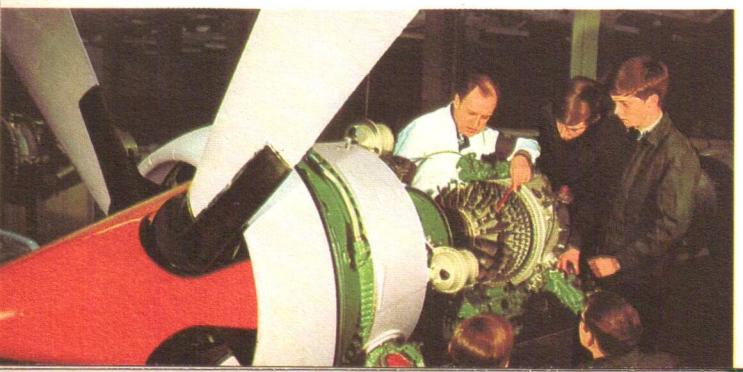
Trainee pilots on their first flight . . . and becoming familiar with the cockpit controls while still on the ground.



Cadets learn about the operations of the control tower at a busy RAF flying station.



Engineering apprentices receive instruction on engine maintenance.



sense of timing, and your capacity for handling constantly changing information.

The third day begins with a thorough medical, and an interview with two officers which lasts about half an hour. Then it is time for you to lose your individual identity for a while and become one of a 'syndicate' of five or six. Putting on an 'anonymity suit' — simply a numbered overall — you will begin the team tests by discussing a subject given to you by a board of interviewing officers, continue with a planning exercise on a set problem, and finish up with some practical tests in the hangar, designed to test enthusiasm, judgment, determination and initiative.

If you pass all these tests you will be offered training as a prospective aircrew officer. If you have joined as a graduate, your first unit might well be the famous RAF College at Cranwell — otherwise you will go to an Officer Cadet Training Unit (OCTU) for the basic RAF officer training, which lasts about four months.

Then you are ready to go on to a Basic Flying Training School, where you will begin your flying, probably in a Jet Provost. As a rough guide, the course consists of about 160 hours flying over 52 weeks and your first solo flight would be after about six weeks, when you would already have had 'ground flights' in an instrument trainer and flown 'dual' with your instructor.

You would have to master 'spin aeros' (putting the aircraft into a spin deliberately and then recovering from it) and then move on to more advanced flying including night exercises, aerobatics and low flying, and the use of more powerful aircraft.

Finally you would gain your 'wings' and at last be able to call yourself a pilot. But even then there would be two new techniques to learn: flying a high-performance aircraft as a weapons system, and then applying this knowledge to a particular type of aircraft (this is called *Operational Conversion).* If this were a two-man aircraft, you would crew up with a navigator and the two of you would train together for most of this course, by the end of which you would be ready to join your first squadron.

Even then, as a pilot in peacetime your 'flying week' might consist of as little as 10-15 hours up in the air. The rest of your time would be spent on flight preparation, on-the-



Just three of the on-the-ground jobs that the RAF will train you for: Air Traffic Control Officer, telephonist and fireman.

ground training (flight simulations, tactics and flight analysis) and perhaps some secondary duty such as being officer-in-charge of a sporting activity, or a divisional officer looking after the welfare of a number of airmen.

If you don't fancy being a pilot, you could still join the RAF Aircrew as a navigator. The selection and initial officer training is still the same, but then you would do a navigators' course, where you would be introduced to military flying and map-reading from the air.

However, a navigator's work is not simply 'navigating' the aircraft — he also controls the weapons and is responsible for cameras and for radar responses. So naturally his training covers these aspects as well as the full range of navigational techniques.

ON THE GROUND

There again, if you don't fancy going up in the air at all, the RAF offers plenty of careers on the ground and will train you in one of a number of associated trades.

For example, you could work with Aircraft Control, whose job it is to keep aircraft apart both on the ground and in the air; or with Fighter Control, whose sphere is air defence and the use of radar and BMEWS (Ballistic Missile Early Warning System).

You could become part of the Airwatch team (as a photographer or radar operator); the Security and Safety team (as a gunner or a policeman or fireman); the Communications team (as a telephonist or teleprint operator); or the Support team (as a driver, clerk, steward or chef). The list is almost endless. You can even get a job as an RAF musician, though you would have to be very good.

There is also the essential engineering section of the RAF, where you could train as an Aircraft Engineer, an Electronics Engineer or a General Engineer.

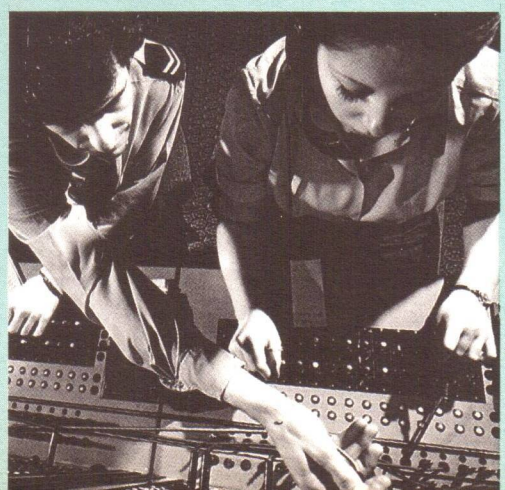
For entering a trade in the RAF, there is no formal entrance requirement, although for some technical trades 'O' levels in Maths and Physics are required. Four 'O' levels, including Maths and a Science subject, are sufficient to apply for an apprenticeship, age limit 16-18½.

If you were to join the RAF in this way, your first six weeks would be on a course at an RAF training centre. You would normally fly on a Service aircraft and take part in lots of outdoor activities such as map-reading exercises and orienteering.

Length of training varies with the trade, but your local RAF Careers Information Office can give you all the details you will need, whether you want to be a dental hygienist, a gunner, a cook or a mechanic. Or, of course, if you want to be a pilot . . .

We would like to thank the RAF for their co-operation and assistance in producing this feature.

All photos by courtesy of the Central Office of Information.





In June 1940 Britain stood alone against Germany. With the war less than a year old, Hitler was virtually master of Europe, and the victorious German forces lay poised across the Channel to deal the death blow to their one surviving enemy.

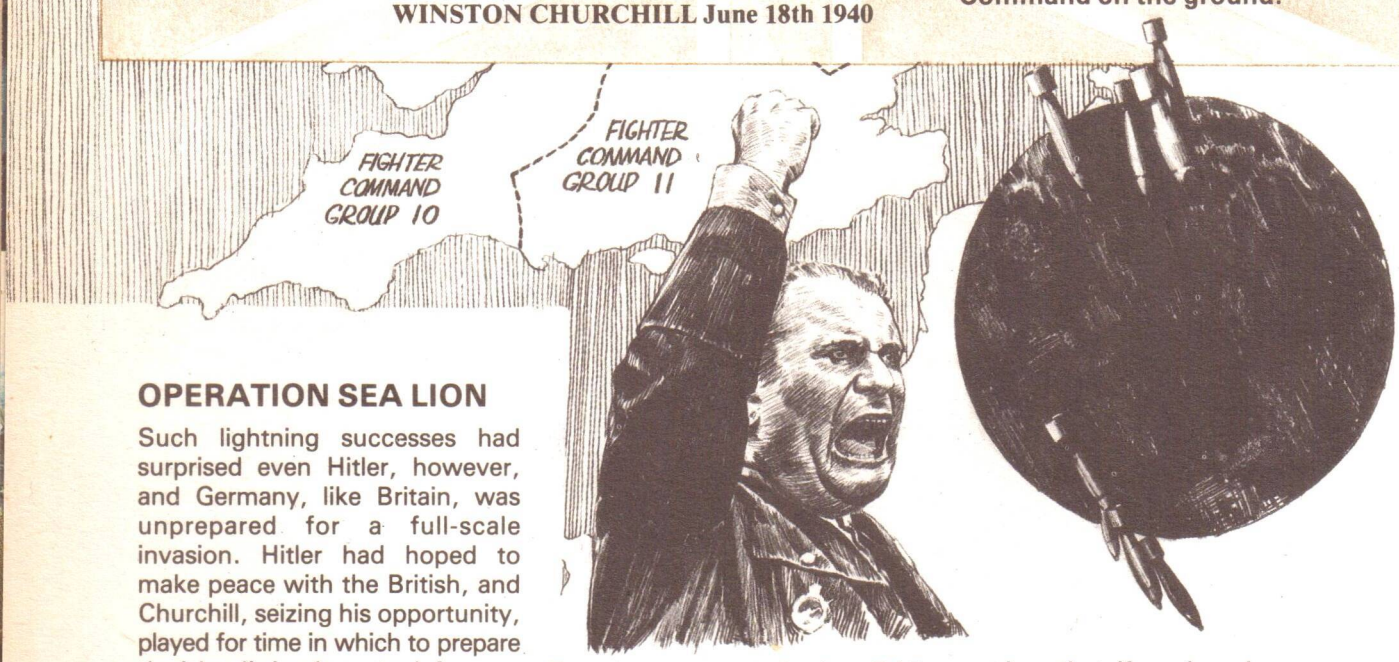


THE BATTLE OF BRITAIN

"The Battle of Britain is about to begin. Hitler knows that he will have to break us in this island or lose the war. If we can resist him, all Europe will be saved. Let us, therefore, brace ourselves to our duties, and so bear ourselves that, if the British Empire and its Commonwealth should last a thousand years, men will still say, 'This was their finest hour'."

WINSTON CHURCHILL June 18th 1940

Aided by RADAR, British fighter squadrons could be given advance warning of German raids, and guided to their targets by Fighter Command on the ground.



OPERATION SEA LION

Such lightning successes had surprised even Hitler, however, and Germany, like Britain, was unprepared for a full-scale invasion. Hitler had hoped to make peace with the British, and Churchill, seizing his opportunity, played for time in which to prepare the island's inadequate defences.

Meanwhile the Luftwaffe, under Göring, was ordered to sweep the Channel of British shipping, which they did from July 10th onwards. The *Battle of the Channel* was a prelude to the major air battle both sides knew must come; the Luftwaffe were still establishing bases on the French coast, and the RAF, under Air Chief Marshall Dowding, was reserving its strength.

When Britain finally rejected the peace offer, Hitler announced the launching of Operation *Seelöwe* (Sea Lion), the invasion of Britain. It was realistically assumed, given Britain's depleted armies, that if an invasion succeeded, the Germans would be in London within 72 hours. One key factor stood between Hitler and success — the RAF, and more specifically, Fighter Command. Göring boasted that he would destroy the RAF within a month, and the invasion date was set for September 15th.

EAGLE DAY

In August the battle began in earnest. Seven hundred Hurricanes, Spitfires, and obsolete Defiants, faced 1,100 German fighters (Messerschmitt 109, 110) and 1,900 bombers (Heinkel 111, Dornier 17, Junkers 88, and Junkers 87 — the legendary Stuka). The Luftwaffe was now prepared for the main offensive.

From August 10th the raids became increasingly heavy. Eagle Day, August 13th, marked the start of Göring's planned decisive onslaught, and the 15th saw the heaviest day's fighting of the whole battle. The Germans flew 1,790 sorties, attacking targets from Portsmouth as far north as the airfields in Northumberland, but the waves of bombers, protected by fighters, met stiff opposition from the RAF.

Estimated British losses, seriously exaggerated, encouraged Göring to believe victory was only days away. Indeed Fighter Command, though shooting down almost twice as many German aircraft, was slowly being worn down. More serious, however, was the loss of pilots, who, unlike aircraft, were virtually irreplaceable. The battle was delicately balanced.

On August 15th Göring visited a front line airfield in France and accused the fighter pilots of cowardice, allowing so many bombers to be destroyed. "You've got the best fighter aircraft in the world! What more do you want?" Adolf Galland, German fighter ace, replied quietly: "Spitfires, Herr Reichmarschall."



THE BLITZ

The Luftwaffe now concentrated its efforts on fighter bases and aircraft factories. They had not been destroying the British fighters at a fast enough rate and now they aimed to strike at the source. Between August 24th and September 6th they mounted 33 major raids, over 1,000 aircraft a day attacking Britain. RAF losses began to overtake the German, and the odds tipped in the invader's favour.

A significant change in tactics, however, now changed the course of the battle. German bombs had been accidentally dropped on London towards the end of August, and the RAF retaliated by bombing Berlin, which Göring had assured Hitler would never happen. Hitler, infuriated, switched the full weight of attack to blitz London.

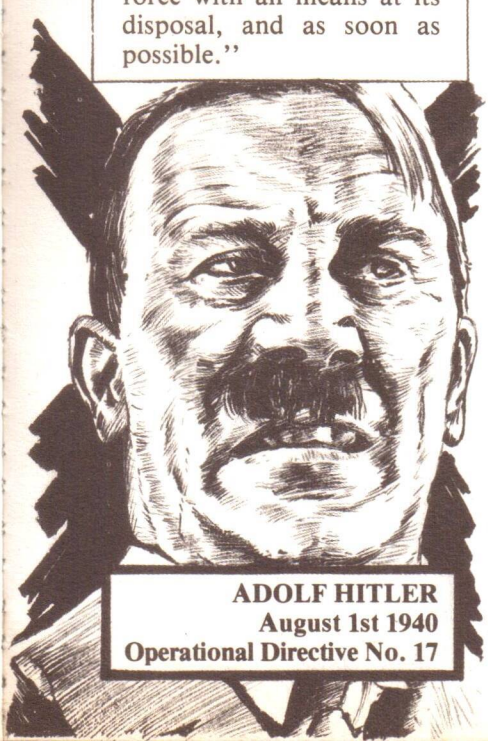
With invasion craft piling up across the Channel and London staggering under continual bombing, the government sensed danger. On September 6th Invasion Alert 1 was issued: "Invasion imminent, and probably within twelve hours." But Fighter Command and the British held out, despite the devastating Blitz which decimated parts of London and many provincial towns.

Hitler was forced to delay Sea Lion, first until the 24th, and then until the 27th, the last realistic date possible. September 15th was to be Göring's final hammer blow. Mass formations swarmed over the coast from 11 a.m. all through the day and into the night, but Fighter Command, backs against the wall, resisted spiritedly to repulse the attacks, destroying 60 aircraft for the loss of only 26.

This German defeat, combined with RAF bombing raids on the invasion fleet, caused Hitler to postpone Sea Lion indefinitely. The Battle of Britain was over.

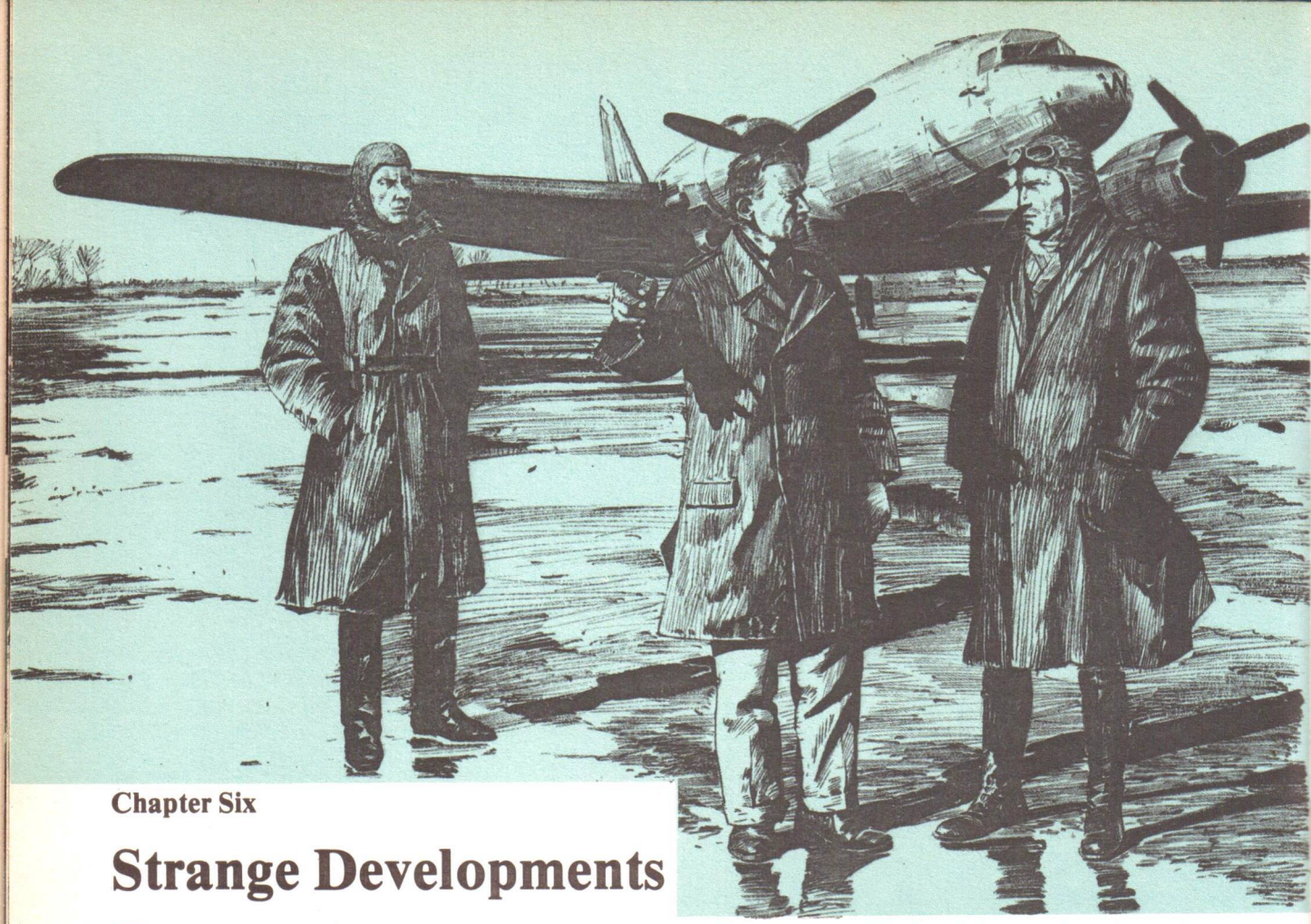
As Churchill said, "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few." For the first time the German war machine had been defeated, thanks to the handful of men in RAF Fighter Command. In their valiant struggle they not only prevented the invasion of Britain, but also paved the way for the ultimate Allied victory which lay five long years away.

"The German air force is to overcome the British air force with all means at its disposal, and as soon as possible."



ADOLF HITLER
August 1st 1940
Operational Directive No. 17





Chapter Six

Strange Developments

Biggles and Ginger stayed at the office until midnight, still hoping Bertie would come through on the telephone. After a glance at the clock Biggles said: "It's no use. Had he been able to call us he would have done so by now."

"But what *could* have happened?"

"The Cub dropped in again for petrol; it then took off and Bertie followed it. So much we know. What happened after that is anybody's guess. He must be on the ground somewhere because he wouldn't have enough petrol to stay in the air."

"I suppose he could have refuelled somewhere."

Biggles shook his head. "No, that's isn't the answer. He's on the ground. He hasn't phoned. That can only mean he couldn't. All we're left with is a crack-up, and a bad one."

"The idea of Bertie lying piled up in a crash at this moment is pretty shattering."

"Can you think of anything else?"

Daybreak found another police Auster on its way to Lysett. On arrival they found the airfield deserted except for a night watchman who knew nothing. Grant, when he arrived, could not do much better.

"Which way did the Cub go when it took off?" asked Biggles.

Grant pointed. "That way. It came in from that direction, on a steady course at not more than a thousand feet."

"I see. Thanks. We haven't heard a word from Lissie so I can only think he must be down somewhere. We'll have a look around."

"Fair enough. I shall be here."

Biggles turned to Ginger. "Let's see what the luck's like."

They got into the Auster, took off, and at five hundred feet followed the line, at cruising speed, taken by the Cub, as pointed out by Grant.

"Did Bertie take the bag of chalk you suggested?" conjectured Ginger.

"He said he would; we'll bear it in mind."

The search was continued until the English Channel came into view but no sign of a plane on the ground was seen.

"There's no point going on," said Biggles, turning back. "If Bertie crossed the Ditch we shall have to wait until we hear from him, and that's all there is to it. Personally I don't think he did. We covered a very narrow track

coming here so we'll take in a bit wider area on the way back."

This was accomplished simply by flying a serpentine course which took in more ground although it mean doubling the distance. Over thickly wooded areas Biggles dropped off some altitude allowing the ground to be examined more thoroughly and from close range.

Suddenly Ginger called out: "I can see something . . . a sort of white smudge in a big field."

"Anything else?"

"Some cattle."

"No aircraft?"

"No. There's a big red brick house at the top end of the field and a barn with a corrugated iron roof tucked in against the trees."

"Big enough to house an aircraft?"

"Easily."

Biggles had not turned. "I'm not going back," he decided. "An aircraft circling low over the field would make anyone down there wonder what it was doing. I feel more inclined to check from ground level."

"There's something very odd about the whole business," said Ginger.

"Let's suppose the Cub did land on that field. All Bertie had to do was mark it, return to Lysett and phone me. But we may be barking up the wrong tree altogether. A closer look at the field should settle that one way or the other."

The Auster had now reached Lysett. Biggles landed, and having taxied close to the office, switched off.

As they got down Grant came out. "Any luck?"

"I can't say for certain," answered Biggles. "We didn't find an aircraft but we saw something interesting. Where's the nearest place I can hire a car? I want to take a closer look."

"There's no need. Why not use mine?"

In something less than an hour Grant's car, with Biggles at the wheel, was on the road to Binfold, the nearest village to the field they proposed to visit. Some distance short of the village a roadman was at work trimming the hedge. Biggles brought the car to a stop beside him. "Good afternoon," he said cheerfully. "I wonder if you can help me. Did you see a plane yesterday?"

"Yes. Come to think of it I saw two, one close behind the other," was the answer, with a rich Somerset brogue.

"Were they flying low?"

"Low enough to make me look up at 'em."

"Which way did they go?"

The man pointed along the road. "Straight down there."

"Towards Binfold."

"That's right."

"Thanks," acknowledged Biggles. "I'm obliged to you."



Two miles on they came to the village, a single street. At the far end of the village a man was painting the front of the public house. Biggles pulled up and got out. "Excuse me, were you working here yesterday?"

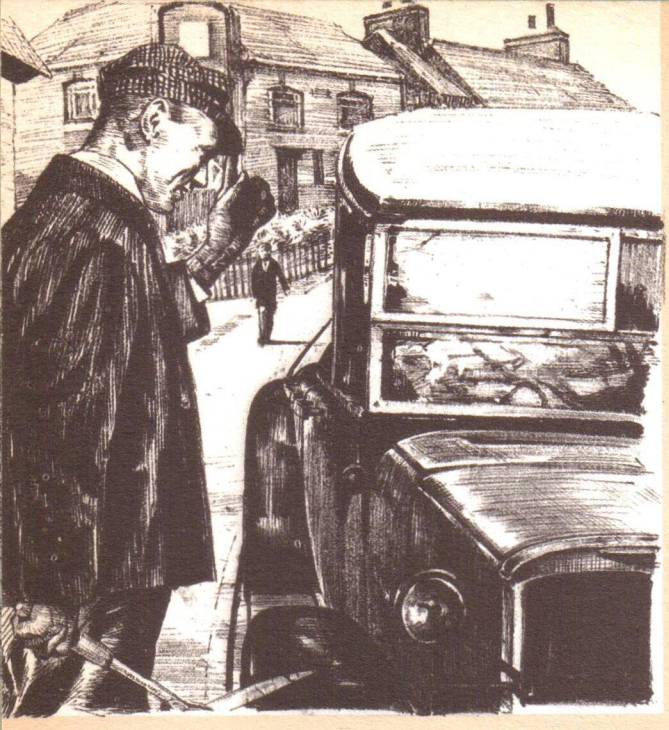
The painter, looking somewhat surprised, said he was.

"Then you must have seen two planes go over, I'm told they were flying low."

The man shook his head. "No planes went over here yesterday, but there's one lately taken to going over at night, making a lot o' noise and waking folks up."

Biggles turned the car and drove slowly back the way he had come. "We're on the track," he said. "The two machines passed over the chap working on the road. Had they

The first aeroplane in the world to be shot down and destroyed by another was a German two-seater shot down over Rheims on 5th October 1914. It is thought that the weapon was a Hotchkiss machine gun, although the plane itself was a Voisin, which was French.



flown straight on they must have gone over the village within a couple of minutes. Apparently they didn't, which means that the trail ended between the roadman and the village."

"I'd say the Cub landed. Bertie would drop his marker."

"Right. What we have to do now is find it. That may not be so easy from the ground as it was from the air."

In fact, it took all the afternoon. Evening was well on the way when at last Ginger got his bearings from the red brick house. The barn in the corner of the field confirmed it. Reaching a thin place in the hedge as near as Ginger could judge to the white mark he had seen, they crouched to peer through it. Ginger could just see what he had seen from the air, although from where they were it appeared more as a vague blur.

"Wait for dark," said Biggles. "Meanwhile we can watch. We may see something."

They waited while the day slowly gave way to dusk. Not until visibility was down to about a hundred yards did Biggles decide it was safe to move. Ginger moved off along the inside of the hedge. Biggles presently made out a vague shadowy figure moving quickly across the open. He watched it stoop, pause, and hurry back to the hedge.

Ginger showed his white hands. "French chalk."

Biggles agreed. "Now we know Bertie has been here. That doesn't mean he landed. The Cub should be here, anyway, or he wouldn't have dropped his chalk bomb. We'll go and have a look in the barn."

It was now quite dark, the sky clear and sprinkled with stars. The air was still. From somewhere not far away came a sharp sound, a click, as of the latch of a gate.

Biggles stopped. They remained where they were, eyes trying to probe the gloom. Suddenly and without warning, came the shattering roar of an aero engine being started. The glow of the exhaust gases moved slowly from the front of the barn into the field. The aircraft began its take-off run.

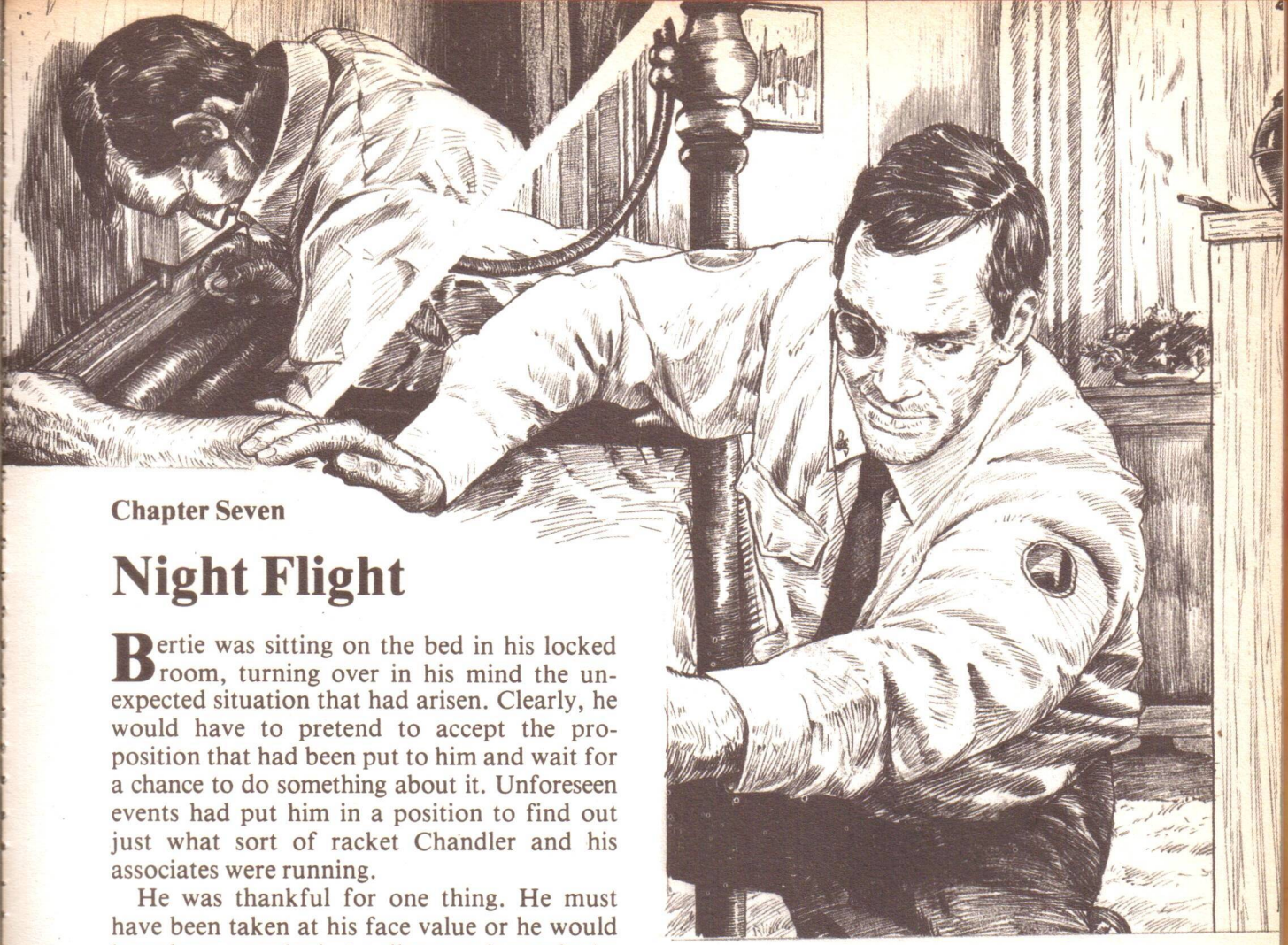
A light moved from the barn to the house. A gate latch clicked. Silence fell. It was a minute before either of them spoke. Then Ginger said: "What do you make of that?"

"It was an Auster," asserted Biggles. "I'd say it was Chandler, off on one of his night trips abroad. We know he pinched a Cub, and I see no reason why he shouldn't have got an Auster from somewhere — we've no proof that the Auster was ours. I'll tell you what. You dash off in the car, find a telephone and get on to the Yard. Ask them to switch you through to police headquarters in Paris. If Marcel isn't there ask for a message to be sent to him, urgent. He should be able to track the Auster — if it's on its way to the same place as that unidentified Cub."

"Then what?"

"Come back here. I'm going to have a look at that barn."





Chapter Seven

Night Flight

Bertie was sitting on the bed in his locked room, turning over in his mind the unexpected situation that had arisen. Clearly, he would have to pretend to accept the proposition that had been put to him and wait for a chance to do something about it. Unforeseen events had put him in a position to find out just what sort of racket Chandler and his associates were running.

He was thankful for one thing. He must have been taken at his face value or he would have been searched. At all events it was lucky for him, because had his pockets been turned out his police pass must have been found. There were also one or two letters addressed to him at the London flat, but these were not important. The police pass, a card in a small leather holder, he thrust well down between the back and seat of the small armchair with which the apartment had been provided.

With nothing to do except think, he wondered exactly what illegal business was being conducted from the farm and who was behind it. Not Chandler. Somebody must have supplied the finance to buy the house and landing field, probably the whole farm property. Was it the uncle, so-called? Dr. Hammal. That seemed more than likely. Chandler was merely employed by him, Bertie decided.

Satisfied there was nothing he could do for the time being, and having made up his mind to accept the proposition, he sat in the chair to await Chandler's return; and as he sat there he heard a faint, intermittent tapping. With a shock he suddenly realized there was something familiar in the succession of taps. Was his imagination playing tricks or had they been the dots and dashes of the Morse Code? Again came the taps, and this time there was no mistake. The message, one common enough, was the three dots and dashes, repeated, that spell a call for help, S-O-S.

Shaken, his brain racing, Bertie dropped on his knees and quickly discovered that the sinister appeal was being carried along the water pipe. Was it possible there was another prisoner in the house? Taking a penny from his pocket he waited for another pause and then tapped, very gently, the question: "Who are you?"

The first aeroplane raid on Britain took place on 21st December 1914. One plane dropped two bombs, which fell in the sea near Admiralty Pier in Dover.

The second raid was again by just one aircraft and took place three days later. This raid featured the first bomb dropped on British soil, with a single explosion near Dover Castle.



At once came the answer. "Name Welsh. Prisoner. Who are you?"

For a moment Bertie was stunned. Taffy! he thought wildly. Of course. He replied: "Name Lissie. Air pilot. Prisoner too." Taffy was in the next room. Bertie asked him if a proposition had been put to him. Taffy said yes, and he had turned it down.

At this juncture, hearing footsteps approaching along the corridor, Bertie sent a swift "message ends" and returned to his chair. The door opened and Chandler came in. "Well?" he asked. "Have you made up your mind yet?"

Bertie smiled wanly. "Of course. I'm not a fool, although as far as I can see I haven't much choice. I can use money as well as most people. Aside from that, a little excitement in a dull world wouldn't come amiss. But there are one or two questions I'd like to ask."

"Go ahead," invited Chandler, closing the door and taking a seat on the bed.

"If I say I'm in the party where do I live?" began Bertie.

"Here, of course. We often have temporary guests, so we've laid on a small stock of the necessary gear in case they arrive without any."

Who, Bertie wondered, were the guests? "When do I make my first trip?"

"Tomorrow night in the Auster. I've put the trouble right."

"Will you be with me?"

"Of course. You'll need me to show you the way and vouch for you at the other end."

"Am I right in thinking we shall be going abroad?"

"You are."

"Where?"

"France. The objective is Marseilles, or just north of it."

"Are we taking something out of the country or going to fetch something?"

"Both." Chandler smiled. "It's a two-way service. That doubles the profits."

"Do you carry any papers in case of trouble?"

"Not me. If I want to go somewhere, I go."

"What do you do if you're challenged?"

"I take no notice of ground signals. Now if there's nothing else, supper's ready if you feel like coming down."

The greatest ace of the First World War was Rittmeister (Cavalry Captain) Manfred, Freiherr von Richthofen, better known as the 'Red Baron'. Richthofen followed in the footsteps of those other great German fighters, Max Immelmann and Oswald Boelcke, who were both killed in action in 1916, although not before Boelcke had been responsible for part of the Red Baron's training in Jagdstaffel 2.

By January 1917 Richthofen had been awarded the coveted 'Blue Max', the *Ordre pour le Mérite,* and his most successful period was the 'Bloody April' of that year when he shot down 21 aircraft, over a quarter of his total of 80 scores before he himself was killed in action on 21st April 1918, his death being credited to a Capt. A. Roy Brown.

Bertie followed his host to the dining-room. The meal was excellent, but in the absence of conversation it was a dull affair. When it was over Bertie was returned to his room and again locked in. With so much to think about it was some time before he got off to sleep, but on the whole he had a fair night.

Morning brought another fine day. Chandler appeared and took him down to breakfast. Afterwards Bertie went out with him to the barn where they looked over the Auster's engine. The conversation was entirely technical.

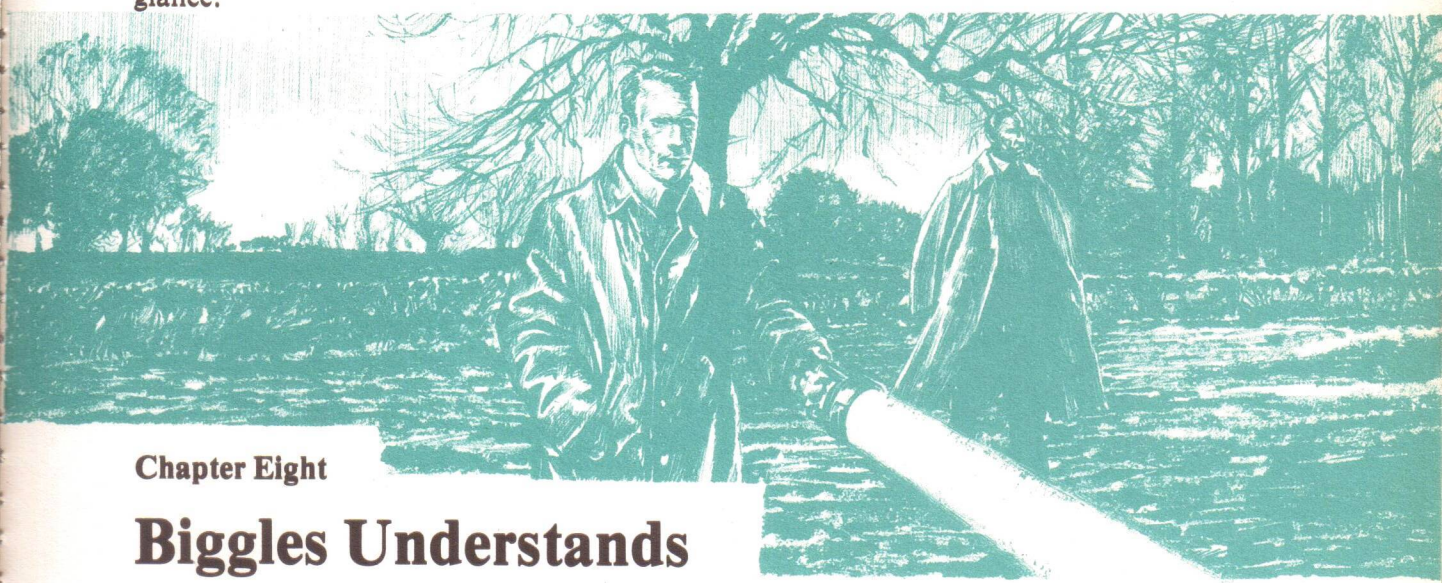
After lunch, another desultory meal, he returned to his room to wait for nightfall. Some time later the sound of an approaching aircraft took him quickly to the window and he was thrilled to see an Auster pass just beyond the bottom end of the field. It passed on out of sight. Soon afterwards he saw it coming back but it held on its way and presently disappeared. He was disappointed but not surprised. With cattle grazing it was unlikely that the field would be given a second glance.

Not long after he saw the beasts being herded out in preparation for the night's work. He stayed at the window until dusk but saw nothing else of interest.

As night closed in Chandler appeared at the door. "Ready?" he queried. "We're all set." Flying caps in hand they made their way through the darkness to the barn, Chandler leading, torch in hand. Doctor Hammal was there and Bertie noticed him hand a small wash-leather bag to Chandler.

The Auster was pulled into the open, Doctor Hammal helping. The two pilots took their places. In dead still air the engine was started and Bertie taxied into position. The Auster moved forward soon to race at increasing speed and bored into the night sky, climbing in widening circles.

Bertie viewed the immediate future without any serious anxiety. As Chandler had said, it was too easy; but he might have felt less sanguine had he known about the message Biggles had decided to send to France.



Chapter Eight

Biggles Understands

Biggles sat still for some time turning over in his mind the situation as it now appeared. He had little doubt that the pilot of the Auster which had just taken off was Chandler. The most puzzling factor was the chalk mark in the field. It must have been dropped there by Bertie. It followed, therefore, that Chandler had landed in the field, and this was supported by the fact that a machine had just taken off. If this reasoning was correct it ended in the mystery of Bertie's disappearance.

Biggles came to the conclusion that a factor about which he knew nothing was somehow involved. One thing, however, was clear. If Bertie was anywhere near it could only be in the house, or in one of the adjacent outbuildings. That he had not reported could only mean that he was unable to do so.

All had been quiet for some time. Biggles resolved to have a look inside the barn to see if the answer was to be found there. He walked slowly towards it. He found the front open. Already the unmistakable smell of

aircraft told him all he needed to know. The barn was being used as a hangar. Having entered he risked flicking on his cigarette lighter for a moment. It was enough. There stood a Cub, beyond any doubt the missing aircraft. At the rear end of the barn there was a bench strewn with tools such as an aero engine fitter would need. On the floor stood some oil drums and a few odds and ends. There was nothing else of interest.

Biggles made his way back to the back of the barn to put it between him and the house, and squatted down under a bush, prepared to wait for Ginger before doing anything else.

It was nearly two hours before a low whistle near at hand announced Ginger's return. Biggles answered and they were soon together.

"Did you speak to Marcel?"

"Yes, eventually. He said to thank you for the tip and we could leave it to him. He'd let us know if anything happened."

"Good enough. I've had a look in the barn. The missing Cub is there."

"So we still don't know if the Auster we saw take off was Bertie's."

"Not for certain, but I think it must have been."

"What's the next move?"

"All we can do is have a closer look at the house. It might be as well to wait a bit, to give everyone a chance to get to bed and sleep.

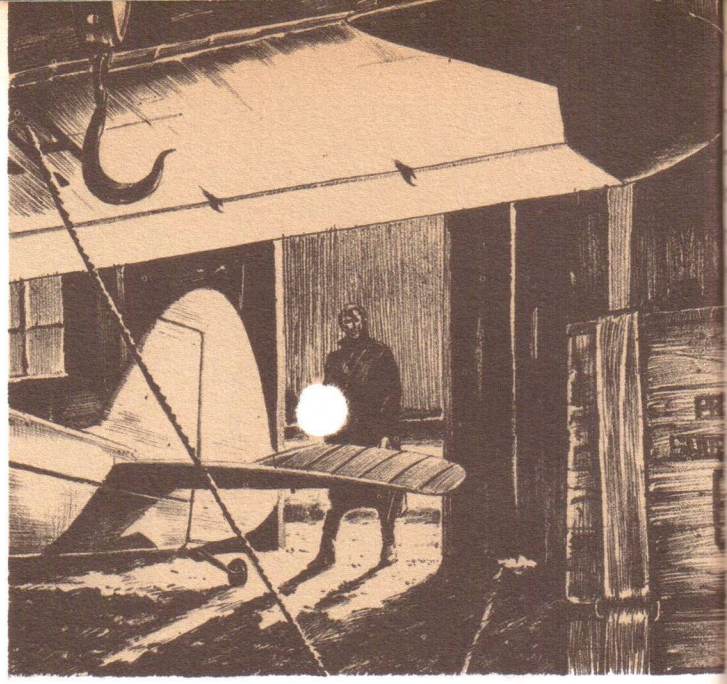
"Afterwards we'll come back here and take it in turns to have a spot of shut-eye while we're waiting for the Auster to come back."

They waited for nearly an hour before they moved off towards the house, now in darkness. Even though the moon was hidden there was still sufficient light for them to see what they were doing. All was silent. They had nearly reached the back door when the moon, riding clear of the cloud to flood the place with light, sent them quickly to the nearest cover. They waited for indications that they had been seen. None came.

"We should be fairly safe," whispered Biggles. "Let's have a look round the front. When we've done that we'll come back and prowl round the outbuildings."

They went round the end of the house to the front where a light showed through the fanlight over the front door. This brought them to a halt. Suddenly there came the purr of a car and headlights flashing through the trees.

"Look out, here's a car," said Biggles



tersely, backing as far into the bushes as he could get.

They were only just in time. Seconds later a big limousine swept into the open area to pull up by the door. A uniformed chauffeur sprang out and opened the nearside rear door. A stockily built man, carrying an attache case, stepped out and entered the front door of the house. The chauffeur parked the car, locked the doors, and disappeared round the far end of the house. Silence returned. A light appeared in one of the upstairs windows.

Ginger, never leaving the deep shadow of the hedge, went to the car and returned. "It's a Daimler," he reported. "I've got its number. It also carries a C.D. plate." (Diplomatic Corps.)

"The devil it does. Who on earth could that be?"

"Are you going to stay here?"

Biggles considered the question. "No, let's go back to the barn and get some rest. We shall then be in position to see the Auster when it comes back."

"If it comes back."

"What do you mean?" asked Biggles, as they made their way back to the rear of the house.

"A horrible thought just struck me. Marcel said something to the effect that it might be necessary to force the machine to land."

"By thunder! I'd forgotten that. Oh well, Chandler will have to take his luck —"

A sharp sound, coming from somewhere near at hand, sent them darting for cover. As they looked about them a voice said urgently: "Wait. Don't run away."

Said Biggles, failing to locate the voice: "Where are you?"

"Up here. Window on the first floor."

Looking up Ginger could just make out a pale object, which he took to be a human face, against the darkness of the room behind.

"I'm locked in. Will you get me out, or tell the police I'm here?"

"Who are you?"

"The name's Welsh."

Understanding hit Biggles like a thunderbolt. "Taffy Welsh?"

"That's right. I'm an air pilot and —"

"Just a minute." Biggles turned to Ginger. "Have a quick look round. There should be a ladder somewhere at a place like this."

"If there is one I'll find it." Ginger hurried off.

"I'm Bigglesworth of the Air Police," Biggles told Taffy. "I know all about you disappearing from Kingsmead in a Cub, with a passenger. How did he get you?"

"He pushed a gun into the back of my neck and made me land here. He lives here. He's using my Cub —"

"I know."

"Now he's pinched an Auster."

"How did you know that?"

"I saw it happen, yesterday. I saw it land in the field, nearly on top of the Cub. The pilot nearly had it. Missed the trees by inches. His engine was smoking like stink so he had to get down where he could."

Biggles drew a deep breath of understanding as Bertie's behaviour was explained. "Do you know what happened to the Auster pilot?"

"Yes. He was put in the room next to mine. He's a chap named Lissie."

"Lissie is one of my men. Is he there now?"

"No. I saw him go out with Chandler some time ago. The Auster took off. That can only mean that Lissie has agreed to work for them. A smuggling racket, I think. They made the same offer to me. I told 'em to go to hell."

Ginger came back. "I can't find a ladder anywhere," he reported lugubriously.

"Hold your hat," said Biggles grimly. "Bertie was in the Auster."

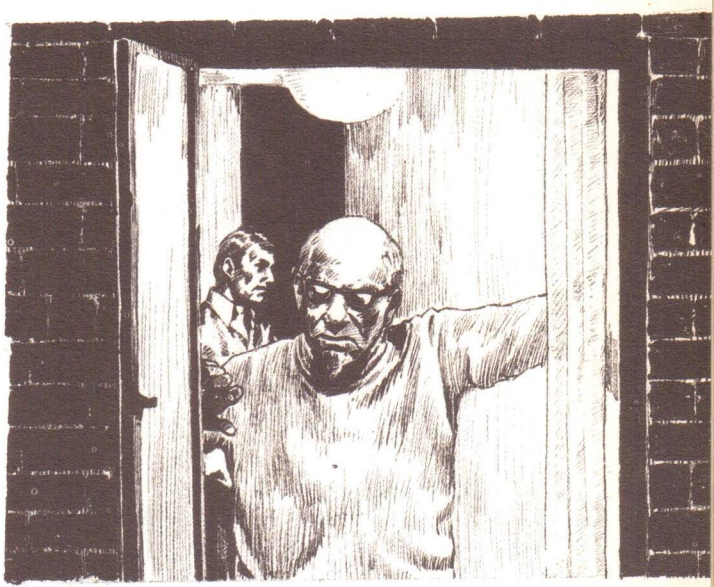
Ginger's eyes saucered.

Looking up again at Taffy Biggles said: "Sorry, but we can't help you for the moment. There's no ladder. But don't worry. We'll be back."

Contrary to popular legend Manfred von Richthofen, the Red Baron, did not always fly a personal aircraft painted blood red all over. He flew several Albatros D IIIs and Fokker Dr Is, and although all were partially finished in red it is thought that only one plane of each type was painted red overall.

At this juncture the light came on in Taffy's room and a voice said harshly: "Who are you talking to? Come away from that window!"

As Taffy's shadow disappeared Biggles dropped lower into the bushes. A figure appeared against the light of the bedroom. For a few seconds it remained there. Then the window was shut with a bang. Faintly from inside the room came voices raised as if in argument.



Biggles took Ginger by the arm. "We'd better get out of this. They may search the grounds."

They hastened to the field gate and then on to the barn. Reaching the place at the rear where they had waited Biggles said: "Now we *have* got something to think about."

"Are you telling me," replied Ginger tersely. "What I'm thinking about is Bertie in the Auster, and Marcel all steamed up to shoot it down."

"One can't be right all the time," returned Biggles philosophically. "It's too late to do anything about it now."

"So we just sit here and do nothing."

"Come to think of it there's one thing we might do."

"What's that?"

"See that the Cub stays on the ground. I'll drain the tank. It won't get anywhere without petrol."

They made a stealthy approach to the front of the barn. All remained quiet. What Biggles had to do did not take long. This done Ginger turned up his jacket collar and settled down, leaving Biggles to keep watch.



Chapter Nine

Tragic News

Time dragged on. Eight o'clock came and still the Auster did not appear. The sun was now well up. Distant sounds of people starting another day's work.

Biggles drew a deep breath. "That Auster isn't coming back today," he declared gloomily. "Something must have happened." Ginger nodded. "I don't know what to think, and that's a fact," confessed Biggles. "One thing I do know is, the Auster can't still be flying on the petrol it had in its tanks when it left here. It must be on the ground."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"I think I'll ring the Air Commodore and ask for instructions. Let him make the decision. Another hour or two shouldn't make any difference. You stay here and keep an eye on things." Biggles got up and set off down the hedge.

The first great British ace was Captain Albert Ball, who occupied a special place in the affections of the British public, partially due to his fighting philosophy which involved charging straight at the enemy whether or not he was outnumbered by ten to one.

Many of his victories were achieved by firing straight upwards into the belly of an enemy aircraft at short range, and his favourite prey was the Roland C II plane. Ball himself flew a Neiuport scout throughout his career, except for a period with the new SE5. He scored his forty-fourth and final victory on 6th May 1917 in his own classic style, but crashed and died the following day.

He found the car and made the best time to the aerodrome to find that Grant had just arrived.

"I'm sorry about your car but we ran into difficulties," he said apologetically. "We're up against something serious and I shall have to ask you to let me keep it for a little while."

"That's all right," answered Grant cheerfully.

"May I use your telephone?"

"Go ahead."

Biggles put through a priority call to Scotland Yard and was soon talking to his chief. The Air Commodore had a lot of questions to ask. The first was, had Biggles any positive information about what was going on in the house?

Biggles had to say no. At first he thought Chandler, with confederates in the house, was engaged in a simple smuggling racket; but the presence of a C.D. car had made him suspect there was more to it than that. There might be a political angle. That way why he was asking for orders.

"What do you propose?" asked the Air Commodore.

Biggles answered that he thought the time had come to search the house.

"Suppose you fail to find Welsh? He may have been moved. Then where are you?"

Biggles saw the Air Commodore was right. "The only alternative to raiding the house is to wait for Chandler to come back and see what he has brought with him," he suggested.

The Air Commodore said it might be advisable to do that; but he would speak to the Commissioner and call him back.

Biggles had to wait half an hour before the call came through. The Air Commodore explained that Inspector Gaskin and one of his men with a search warrant were already on their way in a chartered Viking. With them was a security officer of the Special Branch. What action they took would have to be left to their initiative. Biggles, now fretting with impatience, could only wait.

Rather more than an hour later the Viking came in. Biggles explained the situation as they drove out to the scene of operations.

The first thing Biggles noticed as he led the party up the back of the hedge towards the barn was that the cattle were now in the landing field. They stood bunched under a tree in a corner. He remarked on this to Ginger when they joined him.

'When did this happen?''

''About twenty minutes ago. But never mind about that. Hold your hat. Chandler's here.''



''What?''

''Chandler's in the house.''

Biggles stared. ''How the devil did he get here?''

''I can only tell you he didn't land here in the Auster. I'm beginning to wonder if he was ever in it.''

''That doesn't make sense. Who else could it have been? Bertie wouldn't be in it alone.''

''Chandler may have come back here in a car,'' resumed Ginger. ''Soon after you left I heard a car start up and go off down the drive. About half an hour later I heard another car. That could have been Chandler, perhaps in a hired car, having made a forced landing somewhere.''

''What can have happened to Bertie? And the Auster if it comes to that?''

''Huh!'' broke in Gaskin. ''It looks to me as if we shall find Bertie locked up in the house with Taffy Welsh. It's my bet —''

''Just a minute! What's that?'' Biggles looked down the hedge in the direction of the road on which the car had been left. From it came a succession of urgent toots on the horn. ''I wonder could it by any chance be Grant with a message,'' muttered Biggles. ''Ginger, slip along and see what goes on. We'll stay here.''

Biggles and the others waited. It was ten minutes before they saw him coming back. He was walking slowly, head down. When he reached them it could be seen that his face was pale.

''What is it?'' asked Biggles tersely, sensing something amiss.

''It was Grant. He'd had an urgent call from the Air Commodore and was trying to find us to pass on the message.'' Ginger spoke in a flat voice.

''What was the message? Out with it.'' Biggles's eyes were on Ginger's face.

''Marcel laid everything on to catch the Auster,'' replied Ginger grimly. ''It was tracked by radar right across France to just north of Marseilles, where it landed. It was nearly caught on the ground but got away. It was ordered down and warned that force would be used to bring it down if it refused to land. It took no notice. Guns opened up. It must have been hit. It crashed not far short of the Channel coast.''

''Who was in the machine?'' Biggles spoke slowly.

''A man in a flying cap was found lying on the ground beside it.''

''Hurt?''

''Dead. He'd been shot through the heart.''

Biggles moistened his lips. ''So that's why Chandler came back alone. The Auster was shot down. My fault. One can be a bit too clever. Chandler must have chartered a plane or crossed by boat and came on here by car.''

Ginger nodded and turned away, apparently unable to trust himself to say any more.

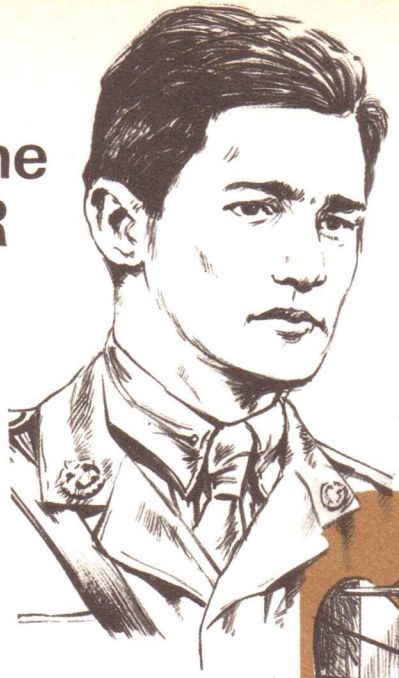
Silence fell.

Biggles lit a cigarette with a hand that was not quite steady.

''I think it's time I had a word with Mr. Chandler,'' he said quietly.

continued on page 52

The Days of the PIONEER AIR FIGHTERS



Flying in the First World War was nothing like flying today, for these were the days of the pioneer air fighters, when people were still learning what it meant to fly and to fight.

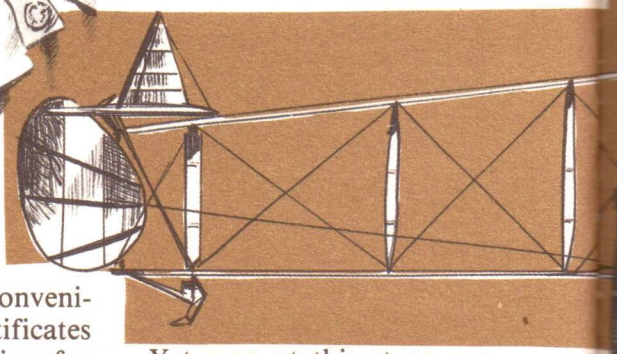
Back in 1914, there was no organised Air Service as such, no RAF. There was only the Royal Flying Corps (officers seconded from the Army) and the Royal Naval Air Service (officers seconded from the Navy) and both were very new and short of pilots.

Volunteers had to be 18 years old, but many would-be pilots, like Biggles himself, conveniently lost their birth certificates when they were applying for enlistment, so as to conceal their real age!

But no one complained. The demand for pilots was becoming increasingly urgent all the time, both to increase the combined force of the RFC and the RNAS and to replace those who had already been killed in action.

Once at the Flying Training School, there was little time for thorough training, and so in reality young 16 and 17 year olds were thrust straight into solo flying and then, on only a few hours flying experience, moved hastily on to the next stage: the School of Fighting.

It was here that the hopeful pilot, filled with the excitement of war, would likely get his first taste of real danger and even death. He had to come to terms with this, if his fighting career was to be a success, and this was where aptitude for real *war* flying was put to the test.



Yet even at this stage procedure was often waived, and a trainee might be given his 'wings' — the coveted symbol that showed he was a qualified pilot — without actually taking the required tests. Signing the forms became a formality and the trainee had 'passed' after perhaps as little as ten hours of solo flying!

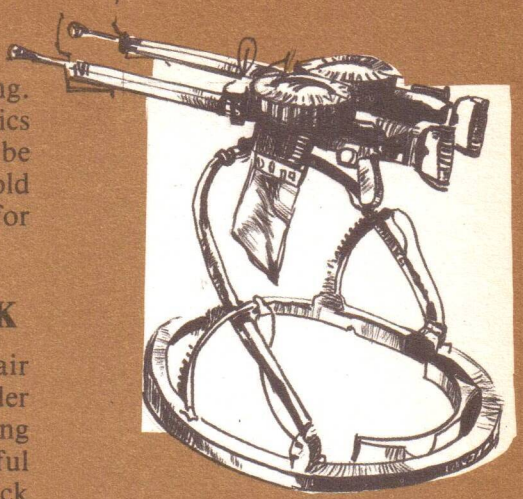
The pilot was ready for action now and would begin by flying a two-seater — perhaps an FE2 where the pilot sat in front of the engine, with the gunner in front of him. In any case the gunner would be there somewhere, with his greater fighting experience, doing all he could to help.

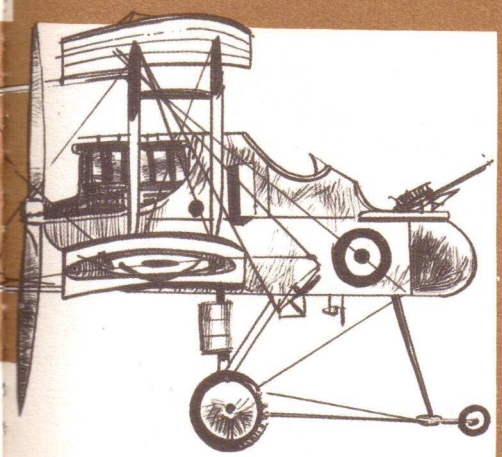


There was nothing as sophisticated as radio yet, so all communication was visual, using hand-signals and Very lights. The noise of the plane's engine even drowned out the noise of

other aircraft, although as a pilot's experience grew he often came to be able to sense their presence — a very valuable skill!

Once acquainted with the Lines and with archie, the pilot was soon sent on patrol, and into action proper. Now the only answer was to pick the game up as he went along. There were no combat tactics as such, although he might be given a few hints by an 'old hand' who had been flying for perhaps a few months.





A MATTER OF LUCK

By 1917-18 however, air combat had become the order of the day, and aerial duelling was a fine art. But even a skilful pilot needed a measure of luck — and some had and some hadn't.

For one air fighter, the first flight might be the last. On the other hand a pilot might survive for years through dog-fight after dog-fight and then be killed on some simple routine flight. Indeed one of W. E. Johns's own squadron survived three years of air warfare only to be killed by archie just one hour before the Armistice was signed.

But it was not just a matter of luck and there are many skilful pilots who are now a part of flying's great history. Already, by the end of World War 1, war in the air had come a long way from the earliest days when pilots had dropped stones on each other for weapons. The introduction of the machine-gun was just one of the developments they lived through — if they were lucky . . .

GLOSSARY

Here is an explanation of some of the terms and signals used in World War 1 flying.

TERMS

AILERON: A hinged flap on the trailing edge of an aircraft wing.

ARCHIE: Anti-aircraft fire. This was found over the Lines, and was white if British and black if German. In World War 2 it became known as *flak.*

CIRCUS: A formation of enemy planes, often called after its leader.

HUN: A term for anything belonging to the enemy, used in a familiar rather than derogatory sense.

JAMPOT: Slang for an engine cylinder.

JOYSTICK: A lever in the pilot's cockpit, used for controlling the wing and tail planes.

LINES: The Lines formed by the trenches at the meeting of enemy territories. There was a No Man's Land in between.

ROCKING WINGS: A signal employed by the leader of a formation to indicate sighting of enemy aircraft and intention to attack.

TRIPLANE: A plane with three wings. The term usually meant the German Fokker, although Sopwith triplanes were used by the British.

VERY PISTOL: A short, large-bore pistol for firing signal lights.

SIGNALS

HAND SIGNALS: Crossed fingers — enemy aircraft.
First finger and thumb in shape of a circle — British aircraft.
Thumbs up — all well.
Thumbs down — all not so well.

VERY LIGHTS: Red — attack.
Green — 'wash-out' (everyone make their own way home).

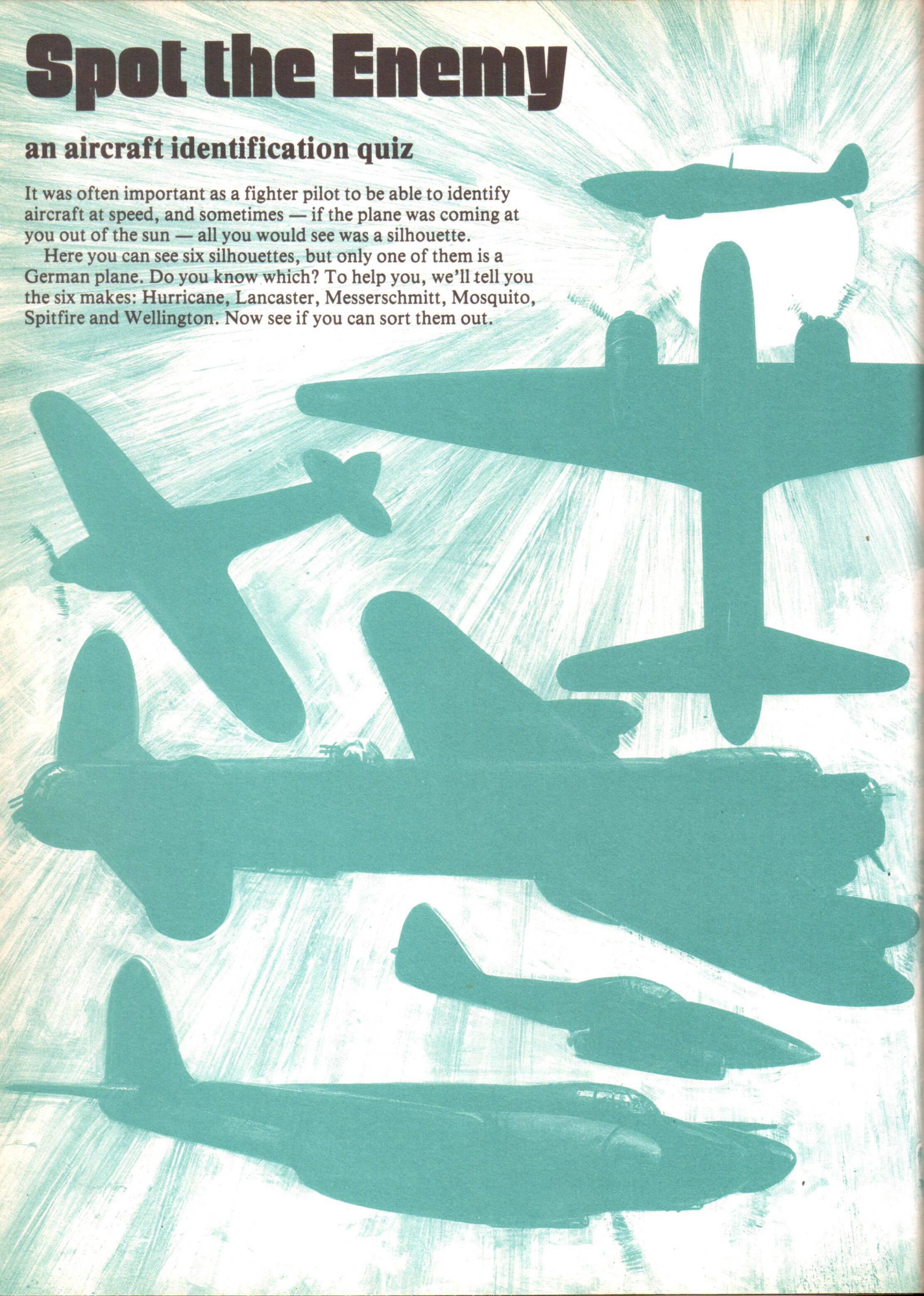
ROCKING WINGS: See glossary.

Spot the Enemy

an aircraft identification quiz

It was often important as a fighter pilot to be able to identify aircraft at speed, and sometimes — if the plane was coming at you out of the sun — all you would see was a silhouette.

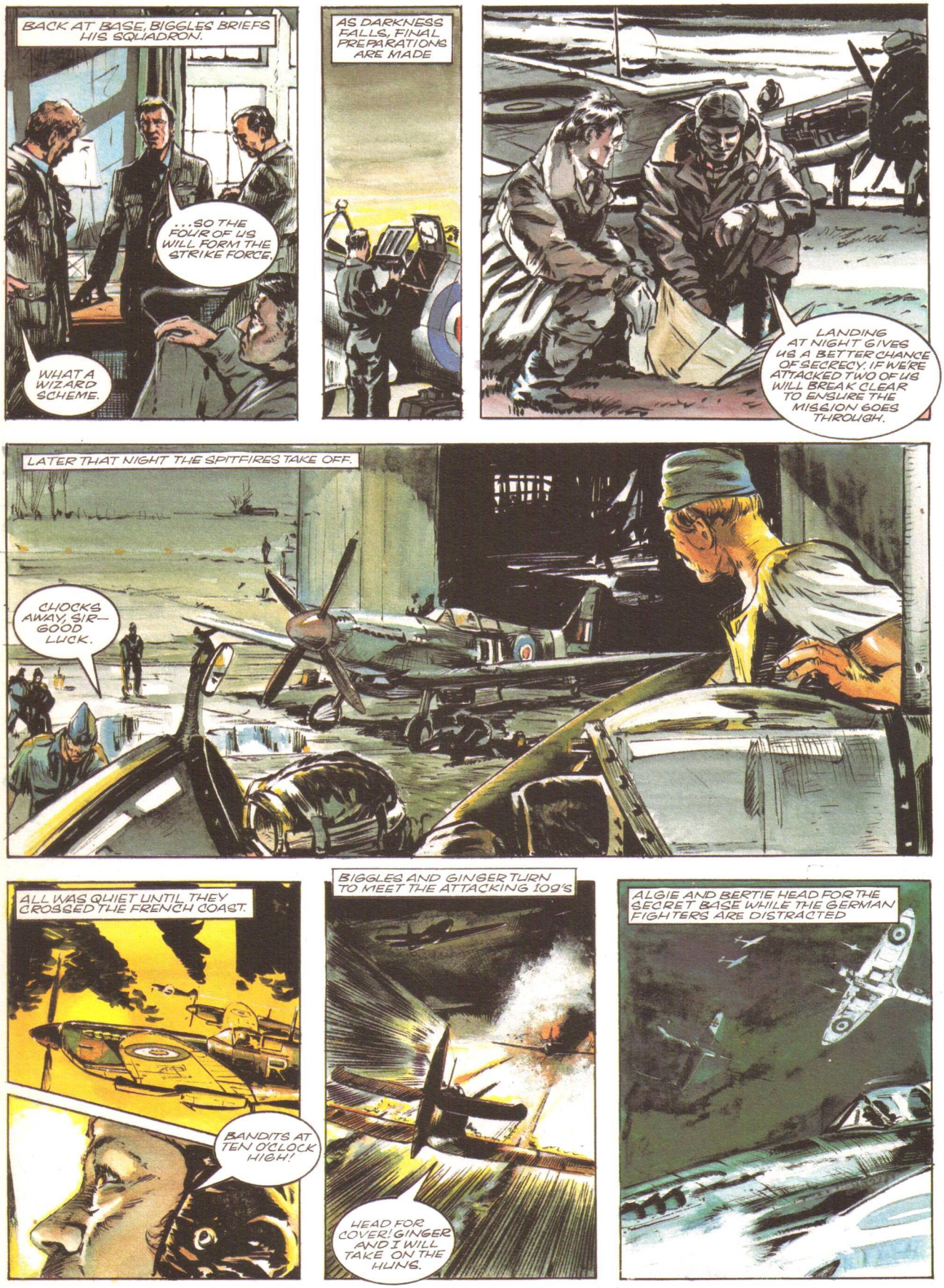
Here you can see six silhouettes, but only one of them is a German plane. Do you know which? To help you, we'll tell you the six makes: Hurricane, Lancaster, Messerschmitt, Mosquito, Spitfire and Wellington. Now see if you can sort them out.



SPITFIRE SQUADRON 666

SPECIAL DUTIES

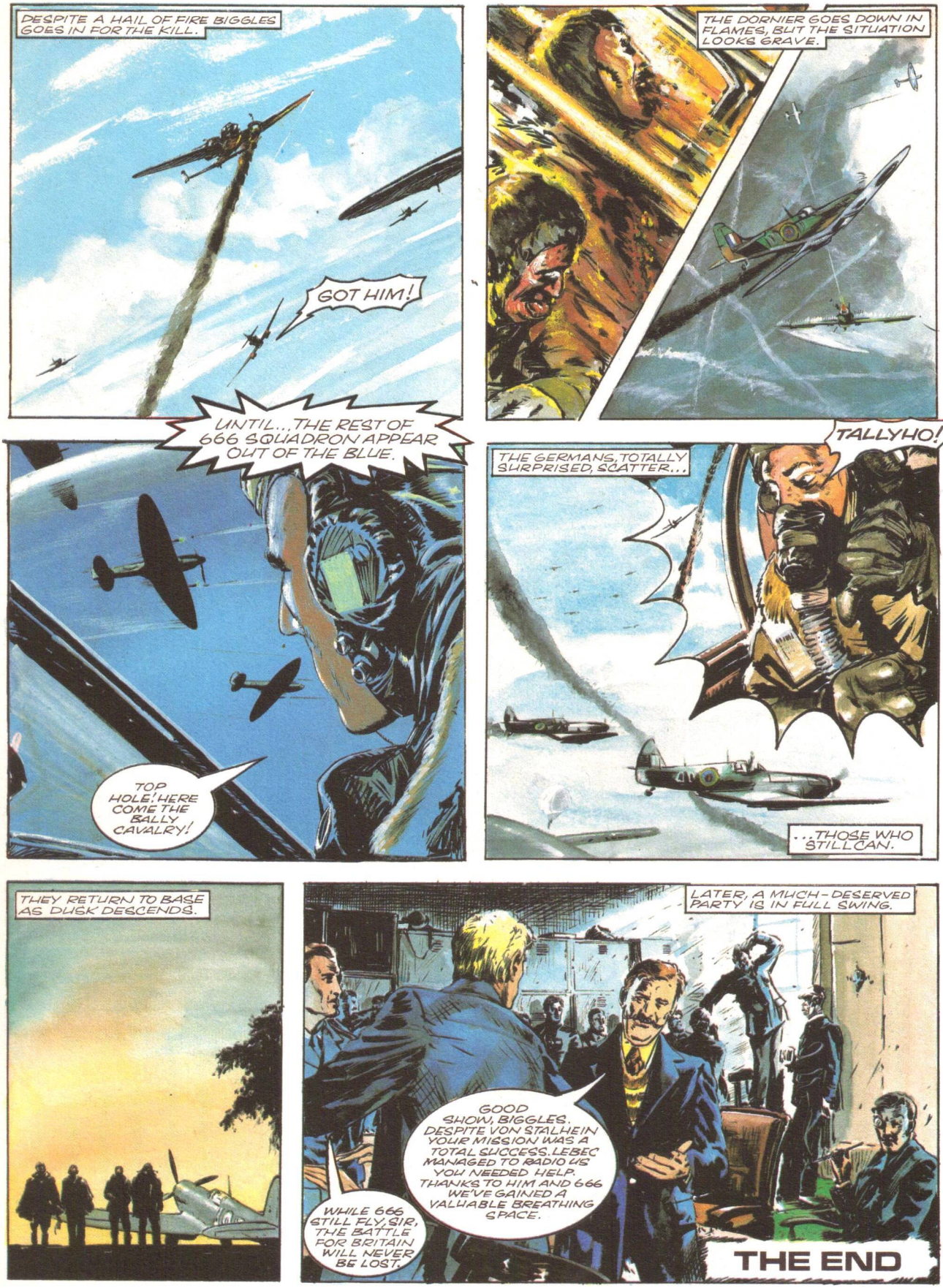



BACK AT BASE, BIGGLES BRIEFS HIS SQUADRON.
...SO THE FOUR OF US WILL FORM THE STRIKE FORCE.
WHAT A WIZARD SCHEME.
AS DARKNESS FALLS, FINAL PREPARATIONS ARE MADE
LANDING AT NIGHT GIVES US A BETTER CHANCE OF SECRECY. IF WE'RE ATTACKED TWO OF US WILL BREAK CLEAR TO ENSURE THE MISSION GOES THROUGH.
LATER THAT NIGHT THE SPITFIRES TAKE OFF.
CHOCKS AWAY, SIR— GOOD LUCK.
ALL WAS QUIET UNTIL THEY CROSSED THE FRENCH COAST.
BANDITS AT TEN O'CLOCK HIGH!
BIGGLES AND GINGER TURN TO MEET THE ATTACKING 109's
HEAD FOR COVER! GINGER AND I WILL TAKE ON THE HUNS.
ALGIE AND BERTIE HEAD FOR THE SECRET BASE WHILE THE GERMAN FIGHTERS ARE DISTRACTED


CHASING THE 109 BIGGLES FAILS TO NOTICE ONE ON HIS TAIL.
BIGGLES! LOOK OUT BEHIND YOU!
NOW IT'S YOUR TURN, FRITZ!
BIGGLES THROTTLES BACK AND TURNS UP AND OVER.
WHOOOOSHH!
BAM!
BAM!
GINGER HAS ALSO SHOT ONE DOWN, BUT THE FOURTH ESCAPES.
DARN IT! HE'LL RADIO OUR POSITION.
UNABLE TO PREVENT THE ENEMY FIGHTER'S ESCAPE, THEY RESUME COURSE.
WITH ANY LUCK WE'LL BE UNDER COVER INSIDE TEN MINUTES.
THE SPITFIRES LAND WITHOUT FURTHER INCIDENT.
AREN'T THESE GOING TO BE FRIGHTFULLY OBVIOUS, OLD THING, WITH THE HUN RAMPAGING ALL OVER THE SHOP?
NOT FOR LONG.
A FIGURE APPROACHED OUT OF THE DARKNESS.
LEBEC?
BONSOIR, MAJOR BIGGLESWORTH. COME QUICKLY AND WE HIDE YOUR PLANES, NO?


BIGGLES AND THE OTHERS TAXI AFTER THE FRENCHMAN.
HIDE THE PLANES? WHAT CAN THE FELLOW BE THINKING OF?
TO THEIR AMAZEMENT THE ROCK FACE APPEARS TO OPEN UP.
VOILA! WE MAKE THIS CAVE TO HIDE OUR WINE FROM LES BOSCHE.
BY JOVE!
LATER, THEY RECEIVE THEIR FINAL BRIEFING FROM LEBEC.
THERE WILL BE THE DORNIER AIRCRAFT AND EIGHT FIGHTER PLANES.
PRETTY POOR ODDS- FOR THE HUN, I MEAN.
WE'LL SEE MORE THAN EIGHT HUNS OVER A LUFTWAFFE BASE — IT'LL BE LIKE PICCADILLY CIRCUS.
NOT IF YOU INTERCEPT THEM HERE.
IF WE STRIKE HARD AND FAST WE'VE A CHANCE TO MAKE IT HOME.
AT THAT MOMENT, LEBEC'S WIFE BURSTS INTO THE ROOM.
DEPÊCHEZ-VOUS! LES BOSCHES!
QUICK M'GIEURS. THE OLD CELLAR LEADS TO THE CAVERN.


A FAMILIAR VOICE MAKES BIGGLES PAUSE.
VON STALHEIN
* IT'S NO GOOD HIDING THEM. WE KNOW THE BRITISHERS ARE HERE WE WILL FIND OUT WHERE...
* ED'S NOTE: BIGGLES' ARCH ENEMY IN GERMAN INTELLIGENCE.
ONCE IN THE CAVERN, BIGGLES QUICKLY MAKES A DECISION.
THEY'RE ON TO US, CHAPS— WE'LL JUST HAVE TO BRING OUR PLANS FORWARD.
THE SPITFIRES ROAR OUT OVER THE AMAZED GERMANS.
ACHTUNG! SPITFIRES!
GOOD LUCK MISIEURS
THE SPITFIRES ARE FORCED TO INTERCEPT THEIR TARGET INSIDE GERMANY.
I SEE THEM!
AND THEY'VE SEEN US WE'VE BEEN RUMBLED
THE DORNIER IS ESCORTED BY TWICE AS MANY FIGHTERS AS EXPECTED.
THIS IS IT, CHAPS. WE MUST GET THAT DORNIER AT ALL COSTS.
WITH THE ADVANTAGE OF HEIGHT THE SPITFIRES DIVE.


DESPITE A HAIL OF FIRE BIGGLES GOES IN FOR THE KILL.
GOT HIM!
THE DORNIER GOES DOWN IN FLAMES, BUT THE SITUATION LOOKS GRAVE.
UNTIL... THE REST OF 666 SQUADRON APPEAR OUT OF THE BLUE.
TOP HOLE! HERE COME THE BALLY CAVALRY!
TALLYHO!
THE GERMANS, TOTALLY SURPRISED, SCATTER...
...THOSE WHO STILL CAN.
THEY RETURN TO BASE AS DUSK DESCENDS.
LATER, A MUCH-DESERVED PARTY IS IN FULL SWING.
GOOD SHOW, BIGGLES. DESPITE VON STALHEIN YOUR MISSION WAS A TOTAL SUCCESS. LEBEC MANAGED TO RADIO US YOU NEEDED HELP. THANKS TO HIM AND 666 WE'VE GAINED A VALUABLE BREATHING SPACE.
WHILE 666 STILL FLY, SIR, THE BATTLE FOR BRITAIN WILL NEVER BE LOST.
THE END



THE ICARUS SYNDROME

"The Art of Flying is but newly invented; it will improve by degrees, and in time grow perfect; then we may fly as far as the Moon."

John Glanville: *A Plurality of Worlds,* 1688

Ancient Greek legend tells how Daedalus, a craftsman, was imprisoned with his son, Icarus, in the labyrinth of Crete by King Minos. Escaping, he made a pair of wings which he attached to his son's shoulders with wax, and they flew away. Unfortunately, Icarus flew too near the sun, which melted the wax, and he was drowned in the sea, although Daedalus himself survived.

SO MUCH HOT AIR

It is, of course, a myth, but man's obsessive desire to fly like a bird is as old as man himself. Early attempts centred around the idea of imitating birds, very much in the Icarus tradition, including many fatalities — of *bird-men* falling to their deaths from towers and cliff-tops.

By the 15th century, however, thoughts were turning to the possibility of flying *machines,* approaching the problem from an engineer's point of view. Leonardo da Vinci, the great Italian artist and inventor, designed a self-propelled aircraft, but realised that a heavier-than-air machine could not be kept aloft by physical effort alone. This kind of research had a significant effect and the quest to fly now became a matter of scientific study.

Nevertheless, it was to be a machine lighter-than-air that first became airborne. Theories about hot air balloons date back to Roger Bacon in the thirteenth century, although there are suggestions that it was known to the ancients.



Icarus flies too near the sun

Not until the eighteenth century did these ideas bear fruit. Two French brothers, the Montgolfiers, succeeded in flying the first balloon capable of lifting a man's weight: on April 25th 1783 their balloon rose to a height of 1,000 feet and landed about 1,000 yards away. In September of that year a sheep, a duck and a cock became the first living occupants of a balloon, and on October 15th a man finally took to the air.

At this time the hot air was provided by burning straw, but shortly afterwards hydrogen successfully superceded it. This led, just over a year later, to the first aerial crossing of the English Channel by hydrogen balloon. The age of flying had arrived.

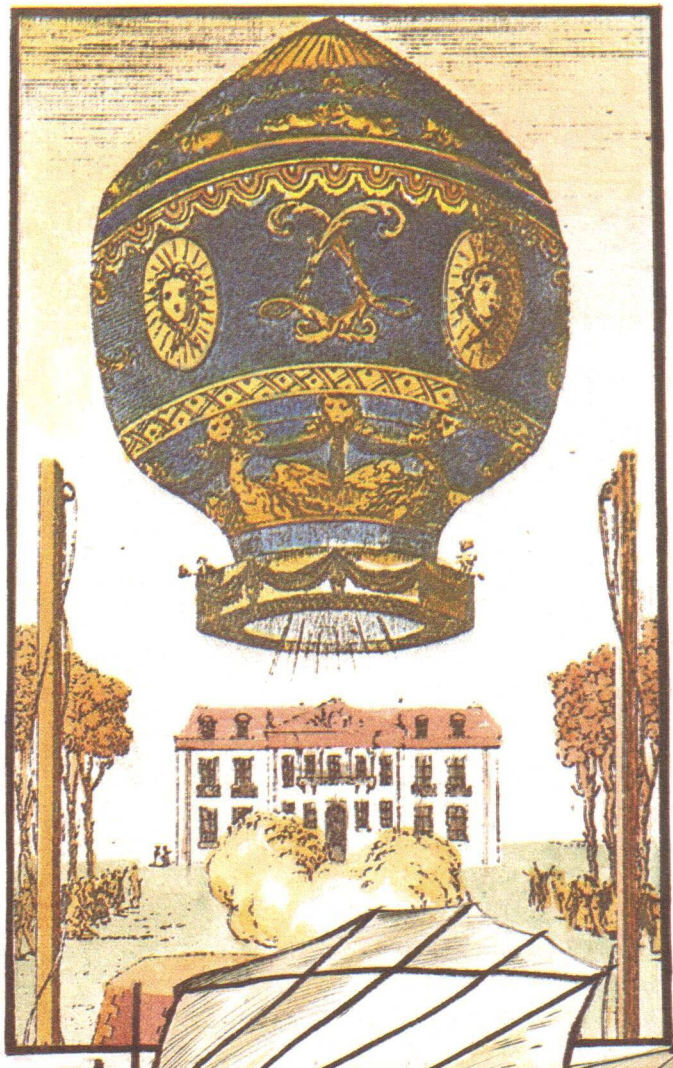
WHAT GOES UP . . . ?

The next stage of development was to devise a means to successfully navigate the flying machine. This was achieved, again by a Frenchman, Henri Giffard, in 1852. His dirigible (navigable airship) was a steam-powered balloon capable of 5 m.p.h.

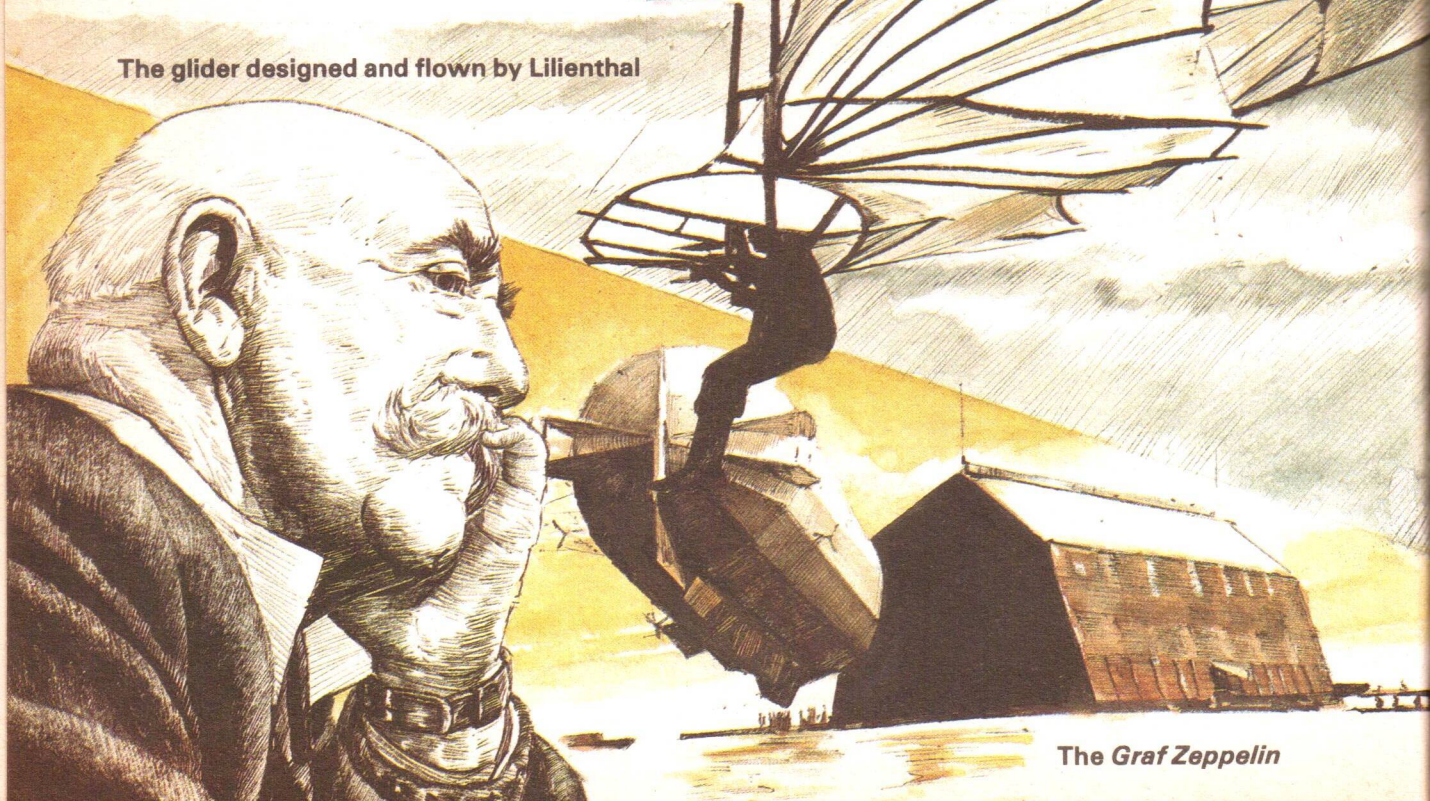
Meanwhile, heavier-than-air craft were also making progress. Sir George Cayley, a Yorkshireman, researched the theory of flight and produced a glider, also in 1852, which carried a ten-year-old boy, and not long after, Sir George's coachman, a distance of some yards. Cayley also invented a powered aeroplane, accepted as the model for the modern aeroplane, but experiments to make it fly were unsuccessful.

The Germans also began making major contributions to the continuing work. Otto Lilienthal constructed a number of gliders during the 1890s, and in over 2,000 flights achieved distances of up to 750 feet. Count von Zeppelin made powered airships his special study, and in 1900 his Zeppelin LZ1 carried five people on a flight lasting twenty minutes.

The Montgolfier balloon takes off



The glider designed and flown by Lilienthal



The *Graf Zeppelin*

The Wright Flyer No. 1

Blériot crosses the Channel

FLY ME TO THE MOON

The breakthrough came with the American Wright Brothers. After three years' experiments with gliders they achieved the first powered flight, carrying a man 120 feet in about 12 seconds. At 10.35 a.m. on December 17th 1903, at Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, a man-made flying machine had finally lifted itself and its pilot off the ground and succeeded in flying.

Although further progress was at first slow, by 1909 Blériot accomplished the staggering feat of crossing the English Channel by monoplane, claiming a £1,000 prize offered by the *Daily Mail.*

In the seventy years since that time aeroplanes have become supreme over gliders, airships and balloons. The invention of jet propulsion, experiments into rockets and supersonic flight have created craft capable of speeds of several thousand miles an hour, and landed a man on the Moon — a round trip of 477,714 miles.

With the success of the American space-shuttle *Enterprise,* man has entered the era of aircraft that can fly through space. Icarus may have died in his attempt to fly, but man has succeeded in going far beyond those first dreams of flying *like a bird.*

"The Eagle has landed" : Man on the Moon



FLYING HIGH

In his long career, Biggles flew many aircraft, of which three of the more notable ones are pictured below.

SOPWITH CAMEL

The successor to the Sopwith Pup, the Camel came into service during 1917 and was used until the Armistice, by which time 3,000 were in use. With a speed of 122 m.p.h., a ceiling of 7315 metres (higher than any other fighter of its time), two Vickers machine guns, and a flying time of 2½ hours, the Camel was excellent in manoeuvring and a very effective fighter plane. A Sopwith Camel, flown by Capt. A. Roy Brown, is accredited with shooting down and killing Baron von Richthofen on April 21st 1918. Used by Biggles in 266 Squadron 1917-18.

The Sopwith Camel, elegant but deadly fighter of the RFC



The Vickers Wellington Bomber bound for another raid on Germany

VICKERS WELLINGTON

The mainstay of RAF Bomber Command at the outbreak of WW2, it was the heaviest bomber (max. 4,500 lb.) with the longest range (2200 miles) of any then in service. It took part in the first RAF raid of the war and served all over the world against Germany, Japan and Italy. More than 11,000 were built and flown during the war. In post-war years, Biggles was to make use of a demilitarised version for the transport of personnel and equipment.

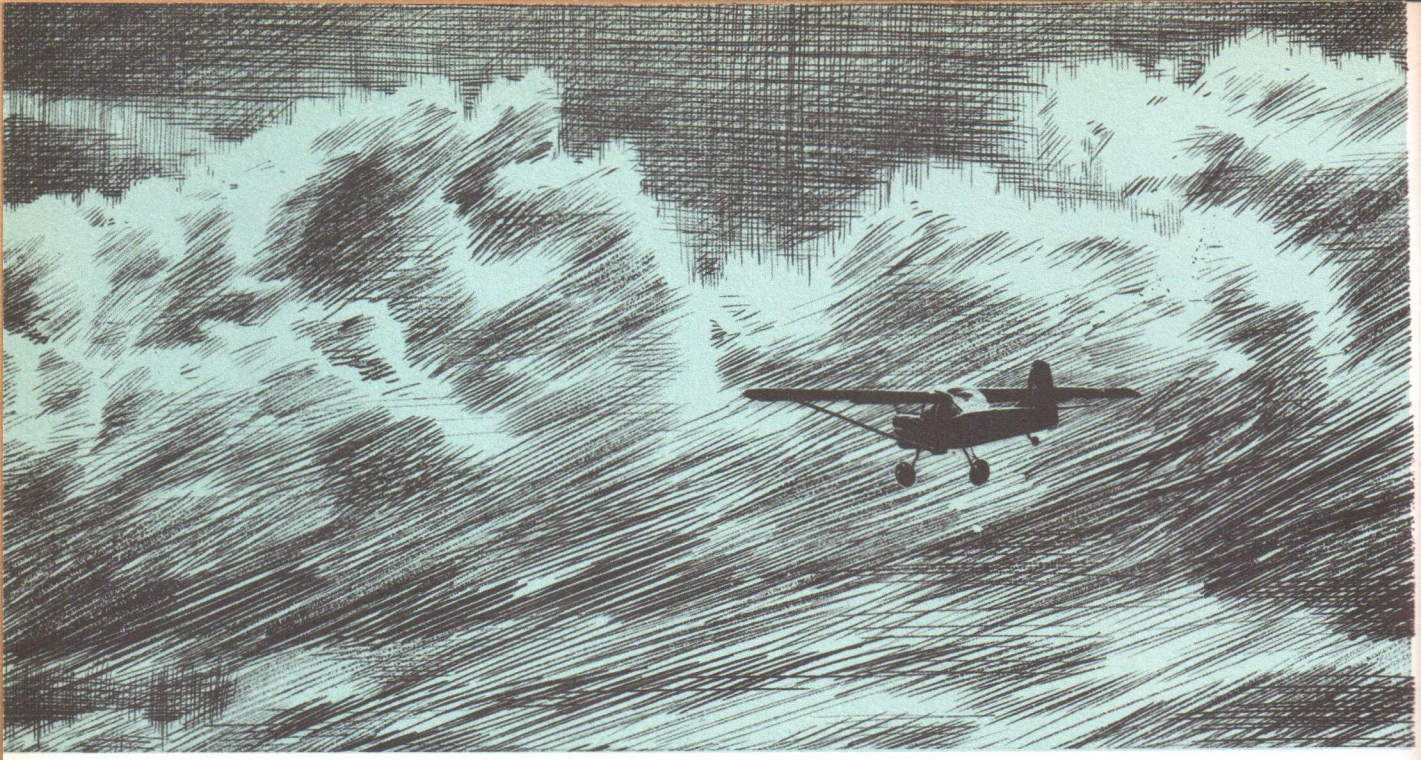
SUPERMARINE SPITFIRE

First built in 1934 as one of the first generation of monoplane fighters, the Spitfire proved to be the most versatile and effective fighter plane of World War Two. Over 22,000 Spitfires and Seafires were built; the Mk 21, at the end of the war, being powered by a 2050 hp. Rolls Royce Griffon engine with a speed of 450 mph. A Spitfire was responsible for the first German planes — two Ju 88s — to be shot down over British soil during the war. Wing Cdr. *Johnnie* Johnson, England's leading fighter ace in World War II, shot down 38 German fighters in his Spitfire. Biggles 666 Squadron were equipped with Spitfires, said by many to be the most beautiful aircraft ever built.

A Supermarine Spitfire, hero of the Battle of Britain



Photographs by kind permission of British Aerospace



Chapter Ten

What Happened to Bertie

Bertie continued to keep the Auster climbing until Chandler said they were high enough, whereupon he swung round towards the English Channel, the sombre face of which, dotted with widely-spaced lights of shipping, had for some time been in view.

"Cut the engine and glide as flat as you can for the next five minutes," ordered Chandler, a few moments later.

Bertie obliged. In the comparative quiet of the idling engine he asked, without showing too much interest: "What was in the bag the Doctor gave you?"

"Diamonds," answered Chandler — surprisingly, Bertie thought.

He whistled softly. "That lot must be worth a packet."

"They're commercial diamonds, not gem stones. Still, they're worth a fair penny. They're indispensable for fine engineering work. The Western powers have agreed not to supply any to Iron Curtain countries."

"Which I take to mean these will find their way to Russia," said Bertie, tight-lipped.

"Take it how you like. Personally I couldn't care less. I'm out to make money the easy way and I don't care where it comes from."

Bertie said no more. He held on his course towards the lights that lined the northern coast of France.

"Okay. You can take her back to ten thousand and cut again when I tell you," ordered Chandler, as they neared mid-Channel.

Bertie did so, and the Auster glided into French air between Le Havre and Bayeau. The Auster was now being ordered persistently to identify itself.

"Take no notice," said Chandler, casually.

"Aren't you taking a chance?"

"Forget it."

Bertie flew on, a glow in the sky far to the east marking the position of Paris. Later, nearer, appeared the lights of Orleans. There were no more signals. The lights of the big city of Lyons, an unmistakable landmark to the east, were passed, and soon afterwards they struck the broad, silver ribbon of the Rhone. Here Chandler said they could begin slowly to lose height. The ground could be seen plainly, with the great river, and the main railway line to the south, which is never far from it, outstanding. It was no longer necessary to rely on the compass. All they had to do now, Chandler said, was follow the railway, which ran right across the Plaine de la Crau, their objective.

Orange, Avignon, Tarascon and Arles, were passed in turn, the Auster losing height all the way, and presently the broad plain lay before them, pale in the moonlight.

"All right. I'll take over now," said

Chandler. "I know the spot where we touch down."

Bertie took his hands off the control column. This suited him, for he could now devote his entire attention to the ground, and so, he hoped, memorize any features near the rendezvous for future reference. Bertie's questing eyes picked up a stationary light, almost in the centre of the plain. From time to time, significantly, it blinked in a manner that suggested a signal.

"So this is it," he thought.

It was soon evident that he was right. Chandler did two circuits round the light to slip off his little remaining altitude and then made a professional landing which ended within thirty yards of a big, powerful-looking saloon car. As the two pilots stepped down, their shoes crunching on a surface of sandy gravel, three figures left the car and walked briskly towards them.

"There you are; what did I tell you?" boasted Chandler, with a condescending sneer. "It's money for old rope." He went on curtly: "You'd better stay here." He took a quick drink from a pocket flask and walked forward to meet his associates.

Bertie saw Chandler hand over the bag of diamonds and receive something in return. They went into a huddle and there was some conversation, but it was carried on in voices too low for Bertie to overhear. Presently they all walked nearer to the aircraft. Chandler came closer, and said to Bertie: "We're taking a passenger back with us."



To which Bertie replied: "In that case the sooner he's aboard the better."

"What do you mean?"

"I've been watching two cars on the road —"

"Oh, shut up. You'll give me the jitters if you go on like this, imagining things," growled Chandler, and turning about rejoined his companions.

Then it happened. The beam of a searchlight, held at a low angle, stabbed the moonlight and began sweeping the plain. So great was the shock that for some seconds nobody moved. By the time they had recovered and had started to move, the light had reached them. The tightly-grouped party split apart like a bursting bomb. Two men rushed to their car. Chandler and another man dashed to the Auster.

"Get going," yelled Chandler, as he got in. The engine sprang to life. The Auster began to move. As the tail lifted a line of tracer shells flashed under it. With the throttle wide open Bertie zoomed in a steep banking climbing turn. The searchlight, which had at first held them, now lost them, and Bertie climbed away east for a while before heading north.

"Nice work," congratulated Chandler.

"I seem to remember you saying this was easy money," said Bertie calmly.

"All right — all right. There's no need to get cocky about it. How could I know this was going to happen? It has never happened before. Make a bee-line for home. Let them do what the hell they like, they can't stop us. I doubt if they'll try." A long pause and Chandler went on: "You know, there's something queer about this. I've never run into anything like it before. Anyone would think they'd been tipped off."

Hardly had the words left his lips when a flash and a loud report, uncomfortably close, came together. Something struck the Auster with a smack. The machine bumped as if pushed up from below.

"Here, let me have her," snarled Chandler.

"If you think you can handle her better than I can, go ahead," invited Bertie, sitting back and taking his hands off the control column.

After a few minutes he was prepared to admit that Chandler was a first-class aerobatic pilot. He did everything possible to confuse the gunners, throwing the machine all

The most successful World War 1 fighter pilot is thought to have been the Frenchman René Fonck, who although credited with only 75 victories is said to have scored many unconfirmed 'kills', bringing his total to 127.

He was a master of deflection shooting and used his ammunition sparingly but effectively, often shooting an aircraft down with only five or six rounds of fire. He died peacefully in his sleep in Paris on June 18th 1953.

over the sky and never flying straight for a moment, until eventually the shooting stopped and one by one the searchlights were doused. The Auster continued to head for the English Channel, kicking the air behind it at maximum speed.

Bertie looked round with increasing frequency at the man in the back seats. He was lying across them in a crumpled heap.

"I don't like the look of him . . . he's unconscious."

"My God! I hope not."

"Is he as important as all that?"

"Too true he is. Some big bug from his London Embassy will be at the farm when we get back, to collect him."

"Well I don't like the look of him."

"Can you reach him?"

"No. I can't pull my seat back to get him while I'm in it."

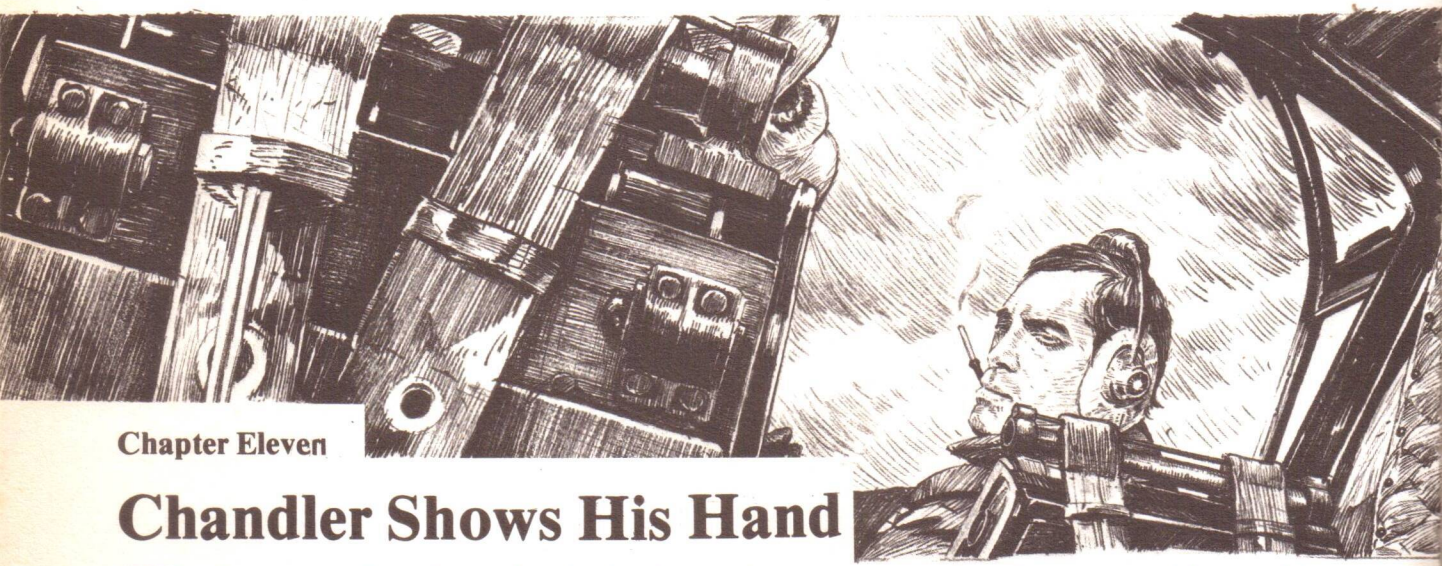
"Then we can't do anything about it."

"I wouldn't say that. We might land and have a look at him."

Chandler thought for a minute. "Do you know anything about first aid? I don't."

"A little. Enough to stop the bleeding."

"Then perhaps we'd better go down. There'll be hell to pay if I arrive back with a dead man."



Chapter Eleven

Chandler Shows His Hand

The Auster was less than a hundred miles from the north coast of France, over the big, hedgeless farmlands which are a feature of that part of the country, before Chandler, who was still in control of the aircraft, said he could see a field which should suit them. The ground was flat and without a tree in sight.

The first glimmers of the new day were streaking the sky eastward and the lights of isolated houses were already pin-pricking the landscape. The dim twilight, with a faint suspicion of ground mist common at the time of year, would make landing conditions trappy rather than difficult, but Bertie did not comment on this. Chandler, obviously an experienced pilot, would be aware of it, and he was prepared to leave everything to his judgement.

Chandler, airscrew idling, circled, losing height, always keeping in sight the wide, irregularly-shaped field, apparently grass, which he had chosen. A landing looked easy. He made his final turn and at little more than stalling speed made a perfect approach, level and as straight as the flight of an arrow.

It was only at the last instant that a glint of light on the occasional puddle of water told Bertie the truth; that what they had taken to be grass was one of the apparently endless reed beds that fill hollows in that particular part of the world.

There was a horrible swishing noise as the



undercarriage wheels dragged through the thin, five-feet-high stalks with their feathery tops. The blades of the metal airscrew threshed into them, slicing and hurling them in all directions. The aircraft lost speed so quickly that both pilots were pitched forward in their seats. As it sank into the lush growth the nose went down and the tail tipped up, and in that position the machine came to rest.

Bertie lost no time getting out. The crash, if it could be called a crash, was not a bad one, and there was little risk of fire; but he was taking no chances.

Chandler came round from the other side and joined him. "This was your bright idea," he rasped in a passion he made no attempt to conceal.

"Instead of standing here arguing about who was to blame, don't you think it would be a good thing to get this wretched fellow out of the back seat to see how badly he's hurt?"

Not without difficulty on account of the position of the aircraft the passenger was lifted out and laid on the ground. Bertie knelt beside him and it did not take him long to ascertain the truth. "He's dead," he announced, getting up. "A lump of something hit him smack in the chest."

"Dead," breathed Chandler. "That's dandy. What are we going to do with him?" Chandler now spoke quietly, as if sobered by shock.

"That's up to you."

"You can do what you like, but I'm hoofing it while the going's good."

"You talk as if you were going alone."

"I am. It'll be easier."

"Aren't you afraid that if I'm caught I'll talk?"

"No. That's one thing I'm not afraid of."

It may have been the way Chandler said this, or perhaps a flash of intuition, that told Bertie what he intended. There would be two dead men instead of one, and dead men can't talk. Chandler would be able to get clean away.

Bertie did not wait for him to reveal his plan. His fist lashed into the pit of Chandler's stomach. Taken by surprise Chandler doubled up with a gasp. Before he could recover, a vicious uppercut sent him reeling, to tangle his feet in the reeds and go over backwards. This gave Bertie all the time he needed to duck under the aircraft and plunge into the reeds on the far side. He did not stop.

After some seconds three shots were fired. But the shooting was blind and did no harm. Bertie, anticipating this, was by this time lying flat, motionless, so that movement in the reeds would not give away his position. There he remained, tense, listening intently for some minutes before getting up and cautiously raising his head to see Chandler, two hundred yards away, leave the reed-bed on the far side and run on towards a line of telegraph poles which almost certainly marked the position of a road.

As soon as Bertie was satisfied he was not coming back he turned his attention to the Auster. He was confident from the way it had flopped down bodily that it couldn't be seriously damaged. After an examination lasting a quarter of an hour Bertie could find no reason why the machine should not fly again if it could be moved to open land.

His big problem was the body of the unlucky passenger, and he spent a few minutes wondering what he should do with it. As he stood there considering the matter he was jerked from his quandary by a hail from two workmen with a horse and plough standing on the upper fringe of the reeds

The highest-scoring Allied pilot during the Battle of Britain was Sergeant Josef František, a Czech pilot with the RAF. His total of 17 was obtained entirely during September 1940, for he was killed on 9th October 1940.

The top-scoring British pilot was Pilot Officer Lock, with 16 victories, plus one shared.

looking at him. He raised a hand to show that he had heard, whereupon one of them advanced towards him, leaving the other holding the horse.

The man, sturdy, red-faced, with a heavy black moustache typical of the type, arrived smiling sympathetically. Speaking of course in his native language he said: "An accident, monsieur? Is he badly hurt?"

"He is dead. Have you a telephone?" Bertie thought he might telephone Paris as the quickest way of getting a message through to Scotland Yard.

"Non, monsieur."

"Where is the nearest?"

"At Lanvin. Seven kilometres."

"Somehow I must fetch help," went on Bertie. "If I could get the aeroplane to the field I think it would fly. That would be the quickest way to get to Lanvin."

"My son could bring our horse. That will make it easy. What will you do with —" the man pointed to the body.

"It will have to remain here until the police come."

The man looked dubious but said he would fetch his son. With the help of the horse the Auster was towed to the field which was to have been ploughed. A few runs up and down the field and he was satisfied. He realized of course that he would be taking a chance in the air, but he felt the circumstances warranted it. He could not afford to waste time. What he really wanted was to get in touch with Biggles before Chandler got home. If Chandler got home first anything might happen. The farm might be evacuated altogether.



Advancing the throttle, not without a certain amount of trepidation, and ready to cut the ignition at the slightest indication of engine or structural failure, he took off. As the minutes passed, and the aircraft continued to behave normally, he breathed more freely and turned slowly to the north on a course for home.

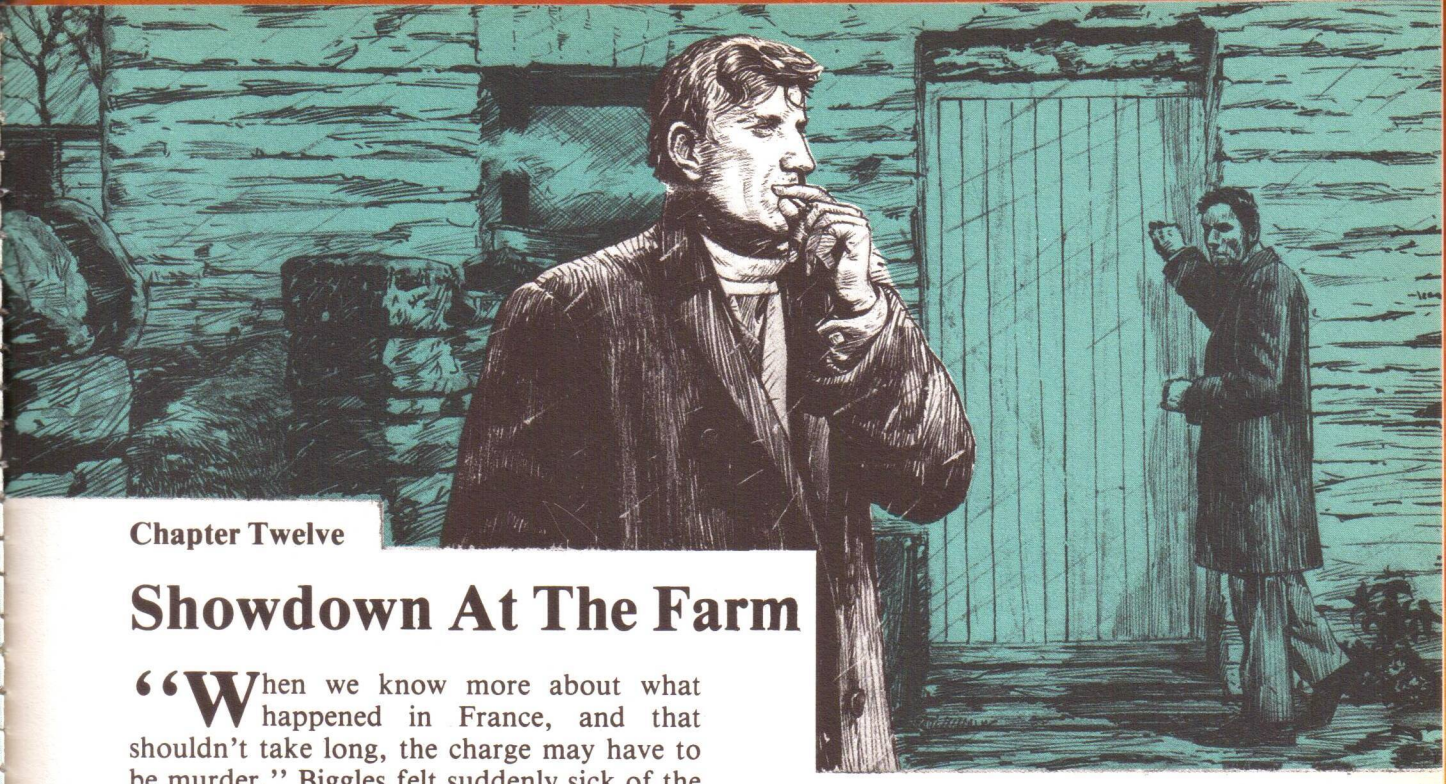
Looking ahead, after taking a little altitude, he saw a front of towering cumulus clouds, like monstrous cauliflowers, being rolled majestically towards France from the Atlantic by a freshening north-westerly breeze.

He had already made up his mind what he would do were he questioned by radio. Indeed, there was only one sensible thing he could do, and that was identify himself, and the aircraft, giving the Interpol signal. The radio seemed strangely silent. He fiddled with it. Not a sound. It was dead. Stone dead. This was real cause for alarm. Even now he might be being challenged. His failure to reply could hardly fail to have unpleasant consequences.

He took a quick, anxious look around. He could see no other aircraft. He crossed the coast and headed out to sea. Nothing had happened, and he had come to the conclusion that he need not have been worried when he was disillusioned in no uncertain manner. Dead on his course, a quarter of a mile ahead, a flash of flame gave birth to a coiling mushroom of black smoke. It was, he suspected, only a warning shot. If he ignored it others would follow, and they would be closer.

Pushing the stick forward for speed he zoomed, at once to be enveloped in cold, grey, clammy mist. He continued to climb, but the cloud was thick and it took a while before he burst out into sunshine with the blue sky above. To his disgust, not only blue sky. Not more than a mile away three *Mystere* fighters, of the French Air Force, were flying in echelon. They peeled off and came down at him.

The largest air assault mounted by the Luftwaffe during World War 2 was Operation 'Mercury', the landing of 22,750 men on the island of Crete in May 1941. There were 10,000 parachutists, 750 troops landed by glider, 5,000 landed by Junkers aircraft and 7,000 by sea. Although officially regarded as successful, the operation cost Germany about 4,500 men and 150 aircraft.



Chapter Twelve

Showdown At The Farm

"When we know more about what happened in France, and that shouldn't take long, the charge may have to be murder." Biggles felt suddenly sick of the whole business.

"You really believe he shot Bertie?"

"What else can we think? The man found dead beside the Auster hadn't been killed in the crash. He'd been shot. Who else could he be but Bertie, and who else could have shot him except Chandler? There's no doubt they left here together. What more do we want to know?

"The motive. Can you think of any reason why Chandler should kill Bertie?"

"Bertie knew too much — he might have talked. Chandler was determined to save his own skin at any cost. He's the man I want."

Gaskin nodded, tapped out his pipe on the heel of his boot and put it in his pocket. "All right, if that's how you want it. I can imagine how you feel. We'd better cover both doors in case Chandler makes a bolt for it."

"Right. Then let's carry on." Biggles spoke to those who were to go to the front. "We'll give you two or three minutes to get into position."

Ginger, with the constable, and Sergeant Smith of the Special Branch, departed.

Biggles and Gaskin waited a little while. Then Biggles dropped the stub of his cigarette in the grass and put a foot on it. "Let's go."

They walked openly to the field gate and on through the back garden to the door. Gaskin knocked. The door was opened by the unpleasant looking female Bertie had seen, and behind her was a young Chinese.

"I want to see the master of the house," said Gaskin. "I'm a police officer."

The woman tried to shut the door, but Biggles pushed past her, and brushing aside the Chinese opened a door on the far side of the kitchen. Through a haze of cigar smoke he saw an elderly man sitting upright in an armchair, a bottle of whisky and two glasses on a small table beside him.

"We're police officers, we have a search warrant. Is your name Doctor Hammal?" he inquired crisply. He felt Gaskin standing beside him.

"It is. What do you want?"

"Where's Chandler?"

"I know nobody of that name."

Biggles shrugged. "Have it your way." He held out a hand. "Give me the key of the room where you have locked Mr. Welsh. Don't waste any more time. I know all about it."

Hammal got slowly to his feet and with the aid of a stick walked to a writing-desk. He opened a drawer. Then in a flash he had turned, pointing an automatic. "Don't move, either of you, or I shall be forced to use this," he said, without raising his voice.

"That won't help you," Biggles told him. "You're only making matters worse for yourself."

Hammal crossed the room to a door on the far side and opened it. "Chandler," he called loudly. "Come here. I want you."

Chandler appeared. His face was flushed as if he had been drinking, but from his expression he took in the situation at a glance. "What's going on?"

"We're police officers and we're here to ask you some questions," informed Biggles. "You're not compelled to answer them and I must warn you that anything you say may be used in evidence —"

"Cut the cackle. What do you want to know?"

"Did you fly an aeroplane to France last night?"

The question seemed to take Chandler by surprise. He forced a laugh. "Now what could have given you that idea?"

"Very well, if you won't tell me I'll tell you. The aircraft was a police Auster and your passenger was Sergeant Lissie of the Air Police."

Chandler could not conceal the shock this must have given him. He crossed the room, poured half a glass of whisky and gulped it neat.

"Is there anything you'd care to say before I arrest you for the wilful murder of Air Police Sergeant Lissie?"

Chandler was looking dazed. "You've got it all wrong," he blurted. "I didn't shoot Lissie."



"You were forced to land in Normandy. There, to cover your getaway, you shot your co-pilot and left him —"

"Nothing of the sort. Lissie didn't tell me he was a cop. The first I knew about that was when you told me yourself, just now. I'll take my oath we parted company by the Auster. I got to a road, got a lift to a garage, hired a car to Barquise aerodrome, where I found a machine to fly me back to England. I arrived back here in a taxi. That's the truth."



Biggles' voice was as hard and cold as ice. "Either you learned Lissie was a police officer, or you didn't want him with you, so you shot him dead and left him lying beside the Auster. Isn't that more like the truth?"

"Nothing like it," protested Chandler, vehemently. "There was a dead man beside the machine but it wasn't Lissie."

"Who else could it have been?"

"I'll tell you. It was —"

"Shut your mouth, you fool," grated Hammal.

Chandler faced Biggles. "The man who was killed, not by me but by the French gunners, was —" He broke off. He must have seen Hammal's gun swing towards him and guessed what was coming. He ducked, jumping sideways like a cat a split second before the gun crashed. Another instant and he was through the door he had left open.

By this time Gaskin had leapt forward, caught Hammal by the arm and wrenched the gun out of his hand. "You're under arrest for attempted murder," he growled. Handcuffs clicked. "Chandler won't get away."

Biggles was not so sure. He dashed back through the kitchen to watch the back of the house.

"Look out! Chandler! Through a window. Making for the field." The voice was Ginger's.

Biggles moved quickly. He looked across the garden towards the field. Through the hedge he could just make out a figure sprinting along the far side. Chandler was hoping to get away in the Cub.

Shouting Chandler to stop, Biggles ran on after him. Chandler had nearly reached the barn, but he heard. He turned, gun in hand. Biggles dived into the ditch, fortunately dry, that ran along the hedge. Chandler fired two shots and ran on.

The most successful British fighter pilot of the Second World War was Group Captain 'Johnnie' Johnson, with 38 confirmed aerial victories, while the most successful destroyer of flying bombs (V-1s) in flight was Squadron Leader Joseph Berry, who shot down 60 during 1944.

Biggles reached the front of the barn just as the Cub came out, engine roaring, and had to jump aside to save being knocked down. As the Cub passed him he yelled: "Stop! Petrol! Look at your —" he threw up his hands helplessly as the Cub went on, gathering speed. Breathing heavily from exertion he could only stand and watch.

As the Cub's wheels left the ground it swept up in a steep climbing turn. Such a take-off would be risky at any time. With a cold engine it was madness. It had climbed to about two hundred feed and was still climbing when the end came. The engine coughed. It coughed again and then choked to death. The airscrew spun to a stop. In a sudden silence that was uncanny the Cub wallowed helplessly in a stall. The nose whipped down and half going into a spin it plunged earthward like a shot bird.

There was nothing Chandler could do. Nothing the best pilot in the world could do. The Cub went into the tree-tops with a rending, splintering crash. Silence fell.

Biggles acted as would any pilot in the circumstances. He tore across the field but when he reached it he found the wreck much as he had expected, the fuselage a crumpled heap, its back broken, one wing torn off at the roots and hanging from a tree. Apparently at the last moment the pilot had tried to jump clear. The door was open and his body lay half in half out of the seat. Feeble moans came from his lips.

Biggles dragged him out of the wreckage. There was nothing more he could do by himself. A deep death groan rattled in Chandler's throat. It was, he knew, the end.

Feeling sick and shaken, Biggles turned away. He saw Ginger racing down the field towards him.

"There's no hurry," he told him, as he ran up. Biggles took a last look at the crash. "They say every man's life is what he makes of it," he remarked philosophically. "Well, this is what Chandler has made of his. Silly fellow. But there, who are we to judge? Let's get back to the house."



Chapter Thirteen

How It All Ended

"Everything's under control. They're all there. Gaskin has arrested everyone and phoned the County police for transport to take them into custody."

"What about Taffy?"

"I let him out. He's all right."

"Have any of the prisoners said anything?"

"Not a word in my hearing."

"I was afraid of that. If Hammal won't open his mouth it will be some time before we know the truth about Bertie."

"What more do we want to know? Chandler murdered him."

"I'm not so sure of that. I can't remember Chandler's exact words, but from the way he said them it seems there might have been *three* people in the Auster when it crashed. If so, who was the third man? I'm wondering if it was to meet this unknown character that the C.D. car came here."

"You think — it may have been this unknown man who was shot."

"Yes. But I'm afraid to bank on it. There were moments when Chandler's explanation had a ring of truth in it. Hammal must know the truth about the man who was killed because that's the first thing Chandler would tell him. He'd *have* to tell him."

They reached the house and went straight through to the living-room. On the table lay a stack of money, in notes; and beside a bag in which apparently they had been contained, a pile of small objects.

"What's all this?" asked Biggles.

The Security Officer answered. "Commercial diamonds."

Biggles looked at Gaskin. "What has Doctor Hammal to say about them?"

Hammal himself answered. "I have nothing to say except that they are my property and I can prove that I paid for them."

"Where were they going?"

"That's my business."

"Who was the passenger Chandler went to France to pick up?"

"I have nothing more to say."

"You may change your mind when you've had time to think it over. We shall find out all we want to know, anyway. I have the number of the C.D. car that was here last night. No doubt the French police have everything sorted out by this time." To Gaskin he went on:



"Can I leave you to take care of things here? I'm anxious to get back to Lysett to see if there's any more news from the Yard."

"About Bertie."

"Of course."

"Go ahead. It won't take us long to get everything tidied up."

For the first time Biggles spoke to Taffy. "Are you all right?"

"Nothing wrong with me whatever."

"Good. Would you like to come to Lysett? There'll be room for you in our car."

"Thanks. I've been here long enough."

Biggles, Ginger and Taffy walked down the field to the road, and finding the car where it had been were soon on their way to the airfield.



As they turned into the gate Ginger clutched Biggles' arm. "Can you see what I see . . . that Auster, standing in front of the sheds?"

Biggles looked hard. "I don't believe it. There must be some mistake. Bertie's machine crashed in France." He brought the car to a skidding halt in front of the office. Grant was standing at the door.

Bertie himself appeared, smiling. "What cheer, chaps," he greeted, fixing his eyeglass.

Biggles gripped his hand and clapped him on the shoulder. "Am I glad to see *you.*"

"Same here, old boy."

"I never expected to see you again. France reported the Auster had crashed."

"So it did, but nothing was badly bent. With the help of a couple of farmers and their nag I managed to get it off."

"I don't mind telling you we were worried stiff," asserted Biggles. "We thought Chandler had shot you."

"Chandler had a crack at me but I got away and he made off. Wait till I see the dirty dog. I'll tell him —"

"You won't tell him anything. When we went to the farm to pick him up he skipped in the Cub. He stalled taking off and went into the deck. He's dead."

"Oh dear! Too bad."

"Whose was the body that got us all foxed?"

"Some johnny we picked up near Marseilles."

"The great thing is you're home."

Grant stepped in. "No doubt you could all do with a bite."

"Several bites, if you can run to it," requested Bertie. "I missed my early morning cuppa."

Over a substantial meal Bertie told his story. "I had about a pint of juice left when I waffled in here," he concluded. "What beats me is, why the French pranged us as they did. They fairly gave us the works. Anyone would think they were all ready and waiting for us."

"Matter of fact they were," said Biggles sadly. "My fault. Sorry."

"Oh here, I say, that was a bit thick."

"How were we to know you were in it?"

"Absolutely — absolutely. I see that."

"Tell me, Bertie. Do you know exactly what the racket was?"

"No, but from what I saw I've a pretty good idea. It seemed to be a two-way job. Chandler was taking over commercial diamonds. He told me so. He also as good as admitted they were intended for one of the Iron Curtain countries. He was, I think, paid for them in cash at the other end. He then brought back with him someone who didn't want to be seen entering the country through one of the regular channels, airport or seaport. Probably some cheap crook in a hurry to leave the Continent."

Biggles shook his head. "I doubt if you're right, there. I suspect it was someone, possibly a spy, important enough to have a foreign Diplomatic Corps car sent to meet him at the farm. We may know more about that presently. Meanwhile, let's get back home. The Air Commodore will be biting his nails waiting to hear what we've all been up to."

For all practical reasons, as far as the Air Police were concerned, this was really the end of the case of the Missing Aircraft.

Nothing else of importance was found at the farm. Hammal persisted in his refusal to speak and some time later was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment on several counts, one of which was the attempted murder of Chandler, to which Biggles and Gaskin were witnesses. His real nationality was never learned.

It turned out that the woman in the house was his wife, and completely in his power. She was charged as an accessory and got off lightly. The Chinese boy was discharged for lack of evidence against him. A simple creature, he swore he didn't know what went on at the farm except that men came and went. This might well have been true.

The identity of the man who had been killed in France was never disclosed. It was said that he carried nothing by which he could be identified. Biggles did not question this, but he had his own ideas about it. He linked it with the fact that although he was able to give the registration of the C.D. car which had visited the farm, he was never told to whom it belonged, although certain people must have known. He suspected it was one of those political matters which for diplomatic reasons are better hushed up.

The most successful fighter pilot in the world was Major Erich Hartmann, Germany's leading ace in World War 2. He was only 17 years old when war broke out and did not begin fighting until October 1942, but his eleven victories on 24th August 1944, following eight on the previous day, were enough to top the 300 mark, and he finished the war with a total of 352, well ahead of Austria's Nowotny on 258.

Hartmann was forced to surrender to the Americans in May 1945, and was handed over to the Russians who gave him a ten year prison sentence. He survived and returned home in 1955, rejoining the Luftwaffe and achieving high rank by the late 1960s.



DOG FIGHT

HOW TO PLAY:

First decide who is to be British and who is to be German, and then place your 'fighter planes' in formation on the board, as marked.

Toss a coin to see who will start, and take it by turn to proceed by throw of the dice. To begin with throw only one of the dice, and move accordingly, travelling always in straight lines in the direction of the diagonals. At each turn, you can move whichever one of your planes you wish.

Continue in this way until one of your planes has an enemy plane within firing range. (At the beginning of your turn, the enemy plane must be within a 6 x 6 square of which your own plane is the nearest corner). You can now attempt to shoot the enemy down, if you so wish. If so, you must state your intention before you start your turn, clearly naming your target. Then you can proceed.

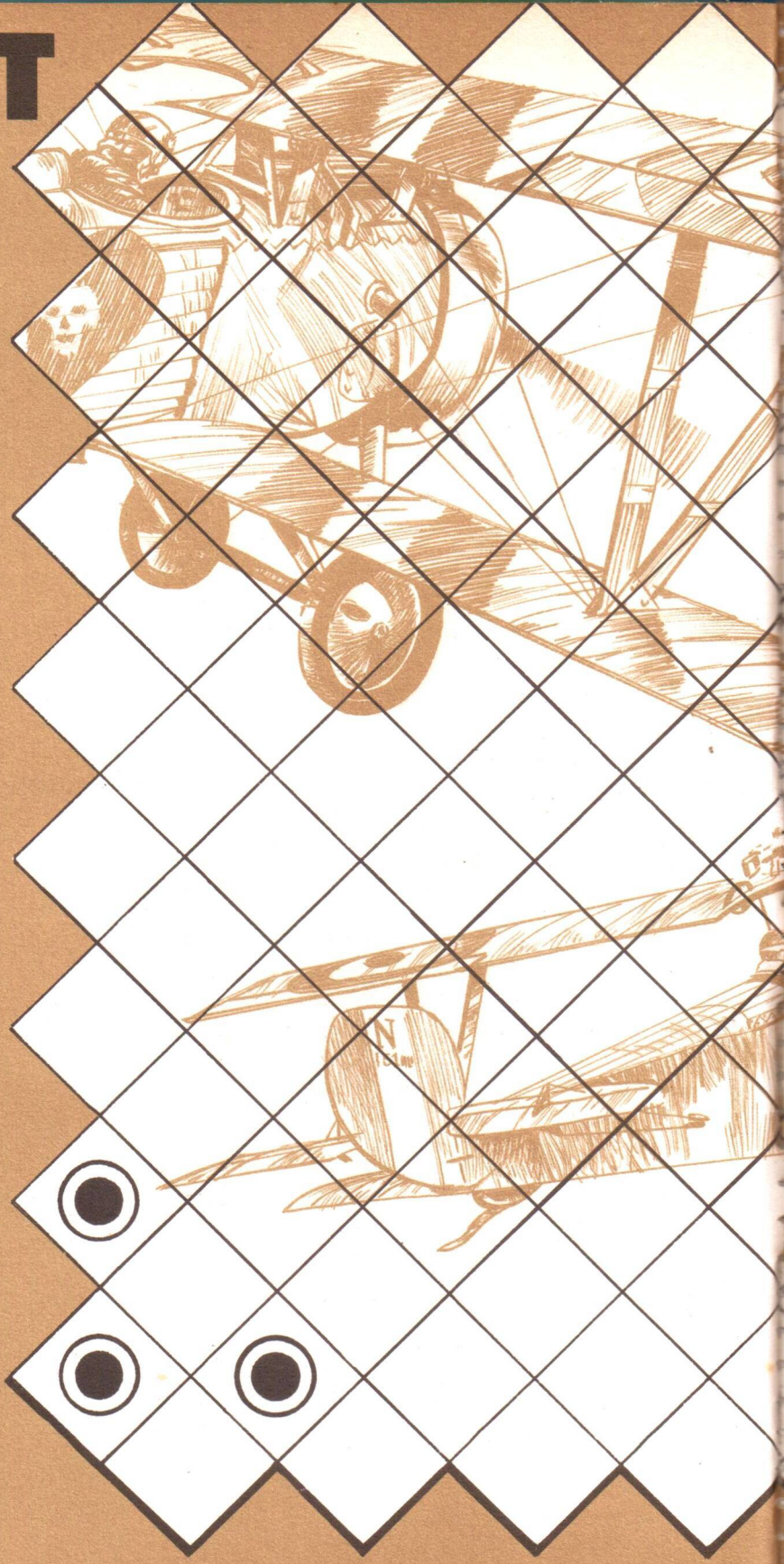
If you are already in line with the enemy plane, throw only one of the dice. This represents your gunfire; and should not be used to move your counter. You need an exact number to score a hit — for example, if you are four squares away, you *must* throw a four; any other throw and you have missed.

If you are not already in line with the enemy, you must throw both dice. Now one of the numbers thrown (whichever you choose) represents a movement of the plane to bring it in line with the enemy while the other represents the gunfire as before. If the combination you throw cannot provide you with a hit, you must still use one of the numbers thrown to move your plane.

If you score a hit, the enemy plane is considered to have been shot down and should be removed from the board, its counter taking no further part in the game. The game then continues with the other player's turn.

If two planes land up on the same square, they are in mid-air collision, and again take no further part in the game.

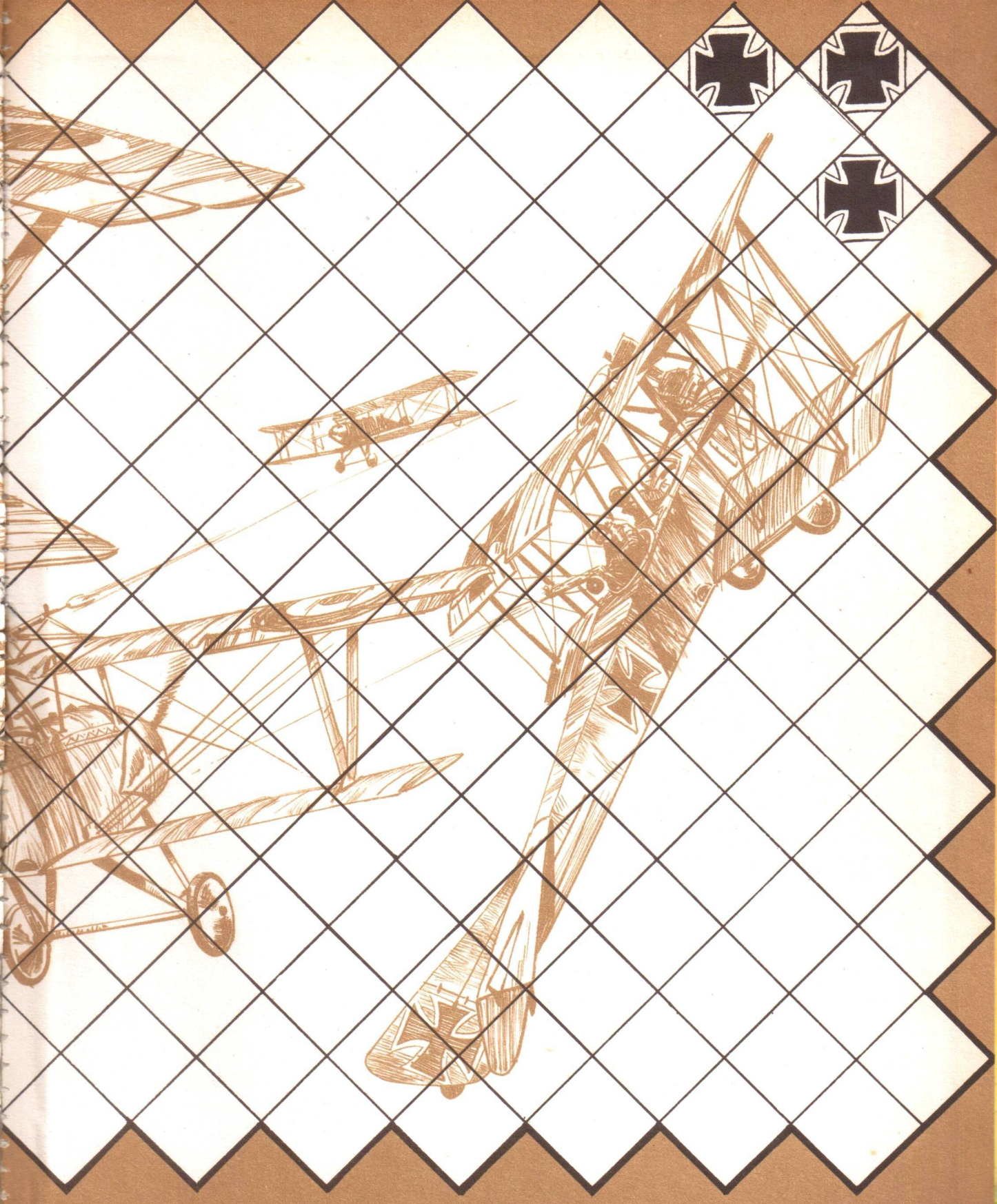
The winner is the first player to shoot down the last of the enemy planes, or else the one who has most planes still intact after a certain agreed time limit. If both players lose their last plane simultaneously through mid-air collision, then the game is drawn.



What you need: 2 dice

3 counters of one colour, and 3 of another

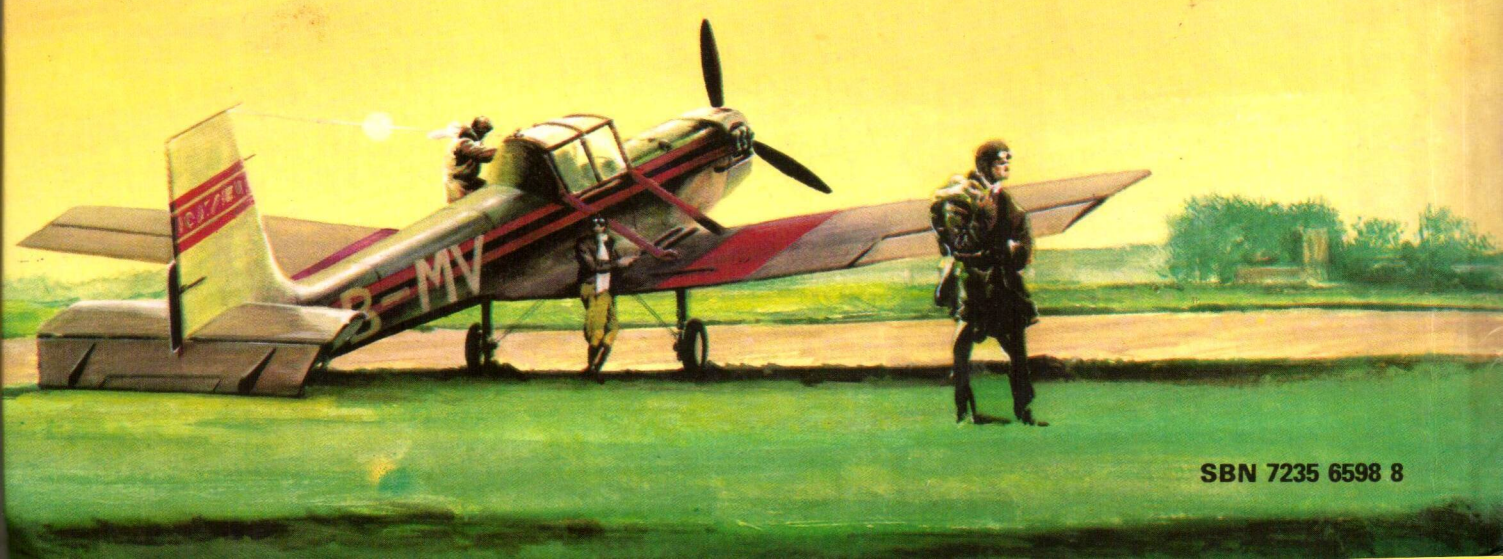
plenty of luck, and some skill.



a game for 2 players

Here's a chance for you to be Biggles for a while, or to be a Hun like the ubiquitous von Stalhein. Imagine the war is on and you are high in the sky, when suddenly you come face to face with the enemy. You must fight and, if necessary, fight to the death . . .

BIGGLES
ANNUAL



SBN 7235 6598 8